

STATE OF FLORIDA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 08-36

(ESTABLISHING GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS)

WHEREAS, the health of its citizens is vital to the state of Florida; and

WHEREAS, autism spectrum disorders, which include autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (also collectively referred to herein as "autism"), are lifelong neurological disabilities that affect a person's ability to communicate, understand language, and socially interact with others; and

WHEREAS, the incidence of autism spectrum disorders is rising at an alarming rate; and

WHEREAS, there is currently no known cause of, or cure for, autism; and

WHEREAS, autism spectrum disorders result in significant social, health, and economic costs to individuals, families, and the state, and, accordingly, constitute a serious, growing public health and welfare concern affecting the people of the state, and the state's economy; and

WHEREAS, caring for a person with autism presents tremendous long-term financial cost concerns for both families and the state; and

WHEREAS, caregivers, educators, and health care professionals interacting with persons with autism spectrum disorders need easy access to information and resources to empower them to make informed decisions and improve the quality of life for persons with autism spectrum disorders and their families; and

WHEREAS, at the state level, numerous agencies are involved in addressing specific needs of individuals with autism, highlighting the need for interagency coordination to fix gaps in the system, avoid costly duplication of efforts, and to aid families in navigating the system to coordinate care; and

WHEREAS, research suggests that early diagnosis and early intervention, at the earliest possible age, provide a "window of opportunity" to maximize the success of therapeutic treatment and reduce costs to individuals, families, and the state; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of Florida's families facing autism and the public as a whole that a Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders be created to establish a proactive and unified agenda for addressing autism in Florida, to review the coordination and efforts of state agencies and other organizations, to encourage public-private partnerships and resource sharing in support of autism and developmental disabilities research and services, to develop a comprehensive Florida autism Web site to help families sort through information and quickly identify resources, to develop a strategy for early diagnosis and intervention, and to make further recommendations to the Governor for the advancement of public policy relating to research, screening, education, and treatment of autism;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, CHARLIE CRIST, as Governor of Florida, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the laws and Constitution of the State of Florida, issue the following Executive Order, effective immediately:

Section 1.

The Governor's Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders (the "Task Force") is hereby created to advance public policy for the research, screening, education, and treatment of autism, to assess the availability of insurance coverage for appropriate treatment of autism, and to recommend a unified and coordinated agenda for addressing autism in Florida.

Section 2.

The responsibilities of the Task Force shall include, but shall not be limited to:

- a. developing a strategy for early diagnosis and intervention by working with medical experts and organizations to determine how best to encourage screenings for autism as part of routine pediatric visits;
- b. reviewing the coordination and efforts of state agencies and organizations relating to the provision of treatment to individuals with autism and resources available to their families and other caregivers;
- c. developing a plan to implement a comprehensive Florida autism Web site to help families, educators, and health care providers sort through information and quickly identify resources;
- d. identifying and recommending methods to remove barriers to the education and awareness of parents, teachers, medical professionals and other caregivers of young children to facilitate early diagnosis and intervention;
- e. identifying and recommending methods to encourage public-private partnerships and resource sharing in support of autism and developmental disabilities research and services;
- f. partnering with agencies and organizations serving the autism community to facilitate collaborative efforts consistent with the purposes of the Task Force;
- g. developing strategy to gauge the prevalence of autism in Florida;
- h. assessing short-term and long-term financial and societal impact of autism to families and the state and making recommendations for cost-saving measures;
- i. developing long-term recommendations as to the education, integration, care, employment, and coverage of persons with autism;
- j. developing strategy to increase community awareness of autism, with special attention to communities with evidenced economic need or health disparities;
- k. developing recommendations to ensure the safety of persons with autism;
- l. exploring options for health coverage of individualized autism treatment, including, but not limited to, speech therapy, occupational therapy, mental health, and alternative therapies; and
- m. exploring methods of identifying and addressing quality of life concerns of individuals with autism and their families.

Section 3.

The Task Force shall, no later than March 20, 2009, provide a written report to the Governor outlining the accomplishments during the previous 12 months. The report shall address issues including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. recommendations regarding changes to Florida statutes, administrative rules, policies, and/or procedures relating to the purposes and duties of the Task Force;
- b. accomplishments in obtaining legislative or administrative change; and
- c. progress related to collaborative efforts with other agencies and organizations.

The Task Force may also provide interim reports as deemed necessary by the Task Force or as requested by the Governor.

Section 4.

The Task Force shall consist of 18 to 22 members appointed by the Governor. All appointees shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor, and the Governor may fill any vacancy that occurs. Membership of the Task Force shall reflect a broad spectrum of interested parties, including, but not limited to:

- a. Health care practitioners;
- b. Advocates for persons with autism spectrum disorders;
- c. Representatives from private and public organizations that address autism;
- d. State and local government representatives; and
- e. Family members of persons with autism spectrum disorders.

The Governor shall select the Chair from the Task Force's membership. The Governor may suspend or remove any Member of the Task Force with or without cause.

The Task Force shall meet at least quarterly. A majority of the Task Force's current members constitutes a quorum. A quorum must be met in order for the Task Force to vote on any proposed action or recommendation. The Task Force shall function according to the guidelines set forth in Robert's Rules of Order, unless other procedural guidelines are adopted by the Task Force.

Section 5.

The Task Force is authorized to call upon any state agency, department, division, or office to supply such data, reports, or other information as it deems reasonably necessary to achieve its objectives. The Department of Health shall provide administrative support and technical assistance to the Task Force as necessary to accomplish the purposes of this Executive Order. All other agencies, departments, divisions, and offices of the state under the control of the Governor are authorized and directed, and all other agencies are requested, to cooperate with the Task Force and provide it with such information, personnel, and assistance as necessary to accomplish the purposes of the order. State agencies shall collaborate in the sharing of information necessary to establish and maintain the statewide autism Web site.

Section 6.

Members of the Task Force shall serve without compensation, but may receive per diem and travel expenses to the extent allowed by chapter 112, Florida Statutes, and to the extent that funds are available. Per diem and travel expenses shall be paid in accordance with chapter 112, Florida Statutes, and reasonable accommodations shall be made for members of the Task Force with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Members of the Task Force who are public officers and employees of state agencies shall be reimbursed for per diem and travel expenses by their respective agencies.

Section 7.

The meetings of the Task Force shall be noticed and open to the public, and shall be conducted in accordance with chapter 286, Florida Statutes. Florida's public records law, chapter 119, Florida Statutes, shall apply.

Section 8.

The Task Force shall continue in existence until June 30, 2009, unless extended by amendment.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and have caused the Great Seal of the State of Florida to be affixed at Tallahassee, this 7th day of March, 2008.

GOVERNOR

ATTEST:

Secretary of State