

Dear Governor Dayton and Legislative Leaders,

I am honored to submit the 2012 Minnesota Autism Task Force report to you. This strategic plan, created by legislative directive, serves as an exceptional road map to guide our state in years to come as it addresses numerous and compound autism related issues. In addition to this report, the task force will prepare annual updates for submission on January 15, 2014 and January 15, 2015.

The Minnesota Autism Task Force originated in 2009, created by Senate resolution, and is now a fully recognized task force with legislative membership from the House and Senate. The role of the Task Force was to review and evaluate the work of previous autism study groups and to develop Minnesota's first formal strategic plan for addressing the issues of autism spectrum disorders. We expect that one immediate result of this strategic plan will be to permit stake holders to seek federal grant funding options. Until now, it was not uncommon to receive denials because we had no formal strategic plan in place.

Besides the specific recommendations in this plan, there are four additional areas that the task force would like you to consider during the 2013 legislative session, and perhaps include in the next biennial budget.

1. **Autism Private Insurance Reform:** The 2012 Minnesota Autism Task Force's position is that it is now time to pass private insurance reform in our state. There are many individuals receiving evidence based "medically prescribed" therapy. However, those individuals are being denied coverage, thus putting the burden back on families, tax payers and the State of Minnesota. History has proven that once private insurance companies are mandated to provide this coverage self-insured companies tend to follow suit. There is no dissimilarity in the autism community that with early intervention, individuals will make progress and improve the quality of their life.

2. **Website:** We request funding and support for an autism-specific website in the 2013 budget. We have heard since 2009 from individuals, parents, caregivers, educators, social services and our medical community that it is very difficult to navigate the system. The diagnosis of autism can be overwhelming for families, and a dedicated website could offer clear and objective information about therapy providers, social service workers, public health nurses, respected public schools contacts, advocacy groups and services offered throughout the state. This has been a recurring request since 2009 and the task force feels it is now time to get this fulfilled.

3. **Autism License Plates:** This legislation had been previously introduced, but stalled. There are legislative leaders who will re-introduce this legislation in 2013. We respectfully ask for full support for this legislation. The task force feels this would be an excellent opportunity for our state to **generate revenue** that could be dedicated specifically to autism related issues.

4. **Autism Commission:** Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability our nation faces today. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one out of 88 individuals is now being diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. There is no indication that those diagnosis rates are slowing down; rather, they are accelerating. Previous Minnesota autism study groups have done a tremendous job. However, as the strategic plan shows, the issues surrounding autism are incredibly complex. We respectfully submit that in 2013 we would seek support to change the current Minnesota Autism Task Force into a Minnesota Autism Commission.

Note: These recommendations were supported by all members of the task force. State agency representatives who contributed to the work of the task force abstained from any discussion or recommendation on these items because the agencies have their own internal procedures for making policy and budget recommendations to the governor.

It was a great honor to chair the 2012 Minnesota Autism Task Force. The passion and work showed by all was tremendous. Each and every one of the 18 members can be proud of their efforts and be confident that Minnesota will be a better place with the implementation of this strategic plan.

Representatives from several state agencies contributed to the work, and I would like to thank each of them: Phil Sievers from the Department of Education; Regina Wagner from the Department of Human Services; Barb Dalbec from the Department of Health; Abbie Wells-Herzog from the Department of Employment and Economic Development; and our Strategic Plan Facilitator Barb Deming from Minnesota Management and Budget. These five individuals were invaluable in this process and were a tremendous benefit to the 2012 Minnesota Autism Task Force.

Finally, I would also like to thank the legislators who served on this task force: Senator David Senjem, Senator Chris Eaton, Representative Nora Slawick and Representative Tara Mack. These four were very helpful and we appreciate their engagement in this process.

On behalf of the 2012 Minnesota Autism Task Force, please accept our report to you. Thank you.

Regards,

Bradley D. Trahan – Chair
2012 Minnesota Autism Task Force