

# Autism Law Institute

**What:** The Autism Law Institute is a national center for the study of legal reforms pertaining to autism. The Institute promotes systematic, comprehensive reform that is necessitated by and responsive to the marked increase in autism diagnoses striking the United States. The Institute provides leadership, scholarship, resources, and guidance to policymakers, courts, advocates, and professionals. Among its purposes are:

- To develop and draft model legislation that coordinates insurance funding, Medicaid services, and special education into a cohesive service delivery model.
- To track developments in autism laws and serve as a clearinghouse for information.
- To serve as a breeding ground for innovative legal reforms to benefit the autism community.
- To conduct symposia and colloquia and to publish scholarly works pertaining to autism laws.
- To publish papers and reports explaining legal and policy issues in everyday terms and highlight issues related to autism law in the media.
- To develop resources and expertise on each state's laws to facilitate individual requests for information or assistance and to promote uniform state laws.

The Institute will bring together lawyers, physicians, policymakers, economists, scientists, educators, ethicists, business leaders, and students to study the legal ramifications of autism and to propose reform.

**Why:** According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism now strikes 1 in 150 American children. A decade ago, the prevalence rate was 1 in 10,000. This rapid explosion has created unprecedented legal challenges and a variety of complex issues that are not being effectively handled. Current laws and institutions are inadequate to address the needs of families affected by autism, and no entity has begun a concerted effort to study and remedy the situation. In short, legal expertise and dedication is needed to prevent a looming crisis. Without improved autism laws, states are facing a multi-billion dollar institutionalization crisis within a few decades.

**When:** Time is of the essence. Legal leadership is needed to develop and promote a roadmap for comprehensive legal reform; instead, there are sporadic, largely parent-driven legislative efforts around the nation, creating a patchwork effect. The leading autism organizations in the country do not employ lawyers to address this void.

**Who:** Directed by Lorri Shealy Unumb, J.D.

- Parent of a child with autism
- Author of "Ryan's Law" (South Carolina's successful legislation requiring insurance coverage for autism treatments and creating a new Medicaid program specifically for children with autism)
- Former attorney with United States Department of Justice
- Former law professor at George Washington University Law School

For more information, contact Lorri Unumb at [lunumb@bellsouth.net](mailto:lunumb@bellsouth.net).

For a history of the South Carolina legislative movement, see [www.scautisminsurancebill.blogspot.com](http://www.scautisminsurancebill.blogspot.com).