

# Public hearing on bill requiring autism insurance set for Thursday



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Some Alabama senators got results today when they called for action on a bill to require most insurance plans to cover behavioral therapy for children with autism.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, said a committee public hearing on the bill would be held Thursday.

The House **passed the bill 100-0 on April 20**, but it has not moved in the Senate was not initially scheduled for a committee hearing this week.

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Eight days remain in the legislative session after today.

Sen. Dick Brewbaker, R-Pike Road, speaking on the Senate floor, told his colleagues not to be guided by insurance lobbyists opposing the measure.

"The purpose of government is not to rally around and protect the strong," Brewbaker said.

Two other senators, Quinton Ross, D-Montgomery, and Bill Holtzclaw, R-Madison, followed Brewbaker and echoed his concerns.

The autism insurance bill, by Rep. Jim Patterson, R-Meridianville, was assigned to the Senate General Fund committee.

The chairman, Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Montrose, **told the Associated Press** earlier that the bill would get a public hearing next

week.

But Pittman said today the hearing would be held this week.

Pittman said he moved the hearing in consultation with Sen. Marsh because "there's just a lot of interest in the bill."

"We need to have the hearing to give everyone time to understand the costs and benefits in the bill."

The committee will vote on the bill May 10, Pittman said.

The effect of the insurance requirement on the General Fund would be a factor to consider, Pittman told AP.

"The costs do play a factor when you have to balance a budget," Pittman said. "The question is how much does it really cost?"

The fiscal note attached to the bill says it would increase costs for Medicaid, the Department of Public Health and the health insurance programs for education employees and state employees by an undetermined amount.

Brewbaker said 26 senators signed a petition asking for a committee vote on the bill this week.

AL.com's Trisha Powell Crain contributed to this report.

Updated at 7:28 p.m. to say public hearing is set for Thursday.

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