



Senator Tom Whatley, left, received his award at the Autism Law Summit in San Diego. Left to right are Whatley, Alabama House Speaker Mac McCutcheon, and State Senator Cam Ward who were also honored. Whatley (R- Auburn) represents a large portion of Tallapoosa County in the state senate.

Autism advocacy group names Whatley Legislator of the Year

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State Senator Tom Whatley (R-Auburn) was named a “Legislator of the Year” at the national Autism Law Summit, a conference in San Diego that brought together over 200 autism service providers, lawyers, state and federal lawmakers, and parents of children with autism.

Whatley, who represents Tallapoosa County in the state Senate, co-sponsored a bill in the 2017 session of the Alabama Legislature that required insurance companies to offer coverage for autism treatment. On May 19, Governor Kay Ivey signed the bill into law, making Alabama the 46th state to ensure insurance coverage for the treatment of autism.

“Senator Whatley was our bill sponsor in the Senate – he eagerly volunteered to carry the bill and was key to getting it out of the Senate,” said Michael Wasmer, the Alabama State Director for Autism Speaks, a national non-profit

dedicated to increasing healthcare access for autistic individuals. “In addition to steadfastly representing autism families, Senator Whatley’s district includes Auburn University, which houses a premier Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program.”

Whatley said it was a deep honor to receive the “Legislator of the Year” award.

“Autism affects thousands of families across Alabama, and it was time that we made sure those families could access affordable treatment for their children,” Whatley said. “There are a lot of dry legislative battles in Montgomery, but this was a fight that was clearly worth it, and it is an honor to be recognized for the small part I played in the process.”

Whatley said that another milestone for the treatment of autism is that the mandate to cover this special treatment kicks in on Jan. 1. He said that Auburn University trains people on this cutting edge treatment, and now hopefully families can take advantage of it.

“I’m especially proud of the autism bill,” Whatley said. It means that insurance companies now must provide ABA therapy coverage for children on the autism spectrum. That kicks in Jan. 1, 2018. Why that’s important, is that it has the potential to change the lives of children. ...It’s a situation where this therapy is making a tremendous difference and has shown the ability to take children with profound issues and take them to a place where they are confident and lead virtually normal lives.

“Plus, we are training people at Auburn University to do this incredible therapy. Now maybe we can keep them here where they can offer it to children in Alabama.”

The 2018 session of the Alabama Legislature will begin on Tuesday, Jan. 9th.

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