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PERATA, NUNEZ TO NAME TOP-LEVEL PANEL TO EYE AUTISM ISSUES IN CA Focus will be Education, Economic Impact, Intervention

SACRAMENTO—At a news conference marking April as “Autism Awareness Month” Senate President pro Tem Don Perata and Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez today announced they would be forming a joint legislative task force of health experts, business leaders, affected family members and academics to examine key issues involving autism in California.

“You look at autism and one statistic is scarier than the next,” Perata said. “A new case every 20 minutes... 20,000 more students with autism in California schools in just twelve years...a nationwide economic impact of \$90 billion, which is expected to double in the next decade. We want to bring together some of the best and most effective minds in California to help us confront this epidemic with short- and long-term actions the legislature and governor can take.”

“This will be a real-time effort with real results,” Nunez said. “In addition to the human costs for individuals and their families, autism has a tremendous cost for our economy and our schools. Putting the influence of the Speaker and the pro Tem behind a top group of effective and dedicated team members, we can make California the leadership state, not just in autism cases, but in autism solutions.”

Dr. Barbara Firestone, president and CEO of The Help Group, the nation’s largest and most comprehensive non-profit education and treatment center for children with autism, applauded Perata and Nunez for establishing the blue ribbon commission. “The call to action has never been greater and the Help Group looks forward to working with Senator Perata, Speaker Nunez and the commission on this important mission.”

Perata and Nunez will be meeting with autism experts and talking with prospective task force members over the next two weeks. The California Legislative Commission on Autism will be funded through existing resources and philanthropic support, as well as staff support from legislative policy and research staff.

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