



**News from**  
State Representative Franco Coladipietro

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## **Local Legislators Hold Forum for Parents with Autistic Children**

**Springfield** ... To a full room of parents, State Representatives Mike Fortner (R-West Chicago) and Franco Coladipietro (R-Bloomingtondale), State Senator Randy Hultgren (R-Wheaton) along with State Senator Carole Pankau (R-Itasca) held their second legislative forum on Monday for parents with autistic children.

Fortner stated that as the fast-growing developmental disability in the country these forums were started to provide a place to allow parents to share their concerns with local legislators. It also allows legislators to provide informative speakers on programs and services available to them.

“These meetings were started because of a constituent who contacted my office about their concerns with how the state could help their child with autism. We decided that a public forum was the easiest way to spread the word about programs and services available to them,” said Representative Fortner.

The topic for this forum was education. The speakers included: Christine Weiner – Director of Giant Steps Illinois Autism School who spoke about the educational services they provide; Dr. Darlene Ruscitti – Regional Superintendent of Schools and Dr. Michael Volpe - Executive Director of SASSED (School Association for Special Education in DuPage County) spoke about educational opportunities available through public school education; and Christopher Kennedy – Autism Society of Illinois spoke about upcoming legislation and its significance.

“Ten years ago autism was diagnosed in one out of 10,000 children and considered a rare disorder. Today, autism is diagnosed in one out of 150 children. This trend presents many challenges to parents and educators. The Regional Office of Education through a myriad of special education services works on this important issue so that all children with autism can reach their full potential. Until we have a cure, education is our best hope,” said Dr. Darlene Ruscitti – Regional Superintendent of Schools, DuPage County.

“This is an extremely important issue for the multitude of families who are trying to find the best educational and medical services for their child. I hope that these parents came away with new information on the educational services that could help assist their child in their long term development,” said Representative Coladipietro.

“I appreciated the opportunity to meet with the parents and hear their concerns,” said Pankau. “I am very pleased that Senate Bill 1900, which would help provide access to insurance for the families of children with autism, has moved forward. It is my sincere hope that the General Assembly can look at more ways we can help to address this growing population.”

Additional questions can be directed to Rep. Fortner’s office at (630) 293-9344 or Rep. Coladipietro’s office at (630) 582-0045.

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