

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Autism Commission to Meet in Southern Maryland *La Plata gathering on October 19 designed to gain public comment*

BALTIMORE, MD (**Date**) -- The third in a series of four regional listening sessions to help the Maryland Commission on Autism gain public input on how Autism Spectrum Disorder impacts the community will be held in La Plata on Tuesday, October 19 beginning at 9:30 a.m., the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) have announced.

The meeting, which will run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., will be held in Room 113 in the Center for Business and Industry (BI) at the College of Southern Maryland, La Plata campus, located at 8730 Mitchell Road in La Plata.

"There is no silver bullet we can provide a child to make autism disappear," said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. "With proper diagnosis and a continuum of care, Maryland can and will help families affected by an autism-related diagnosis to better meet the challenges they face."

During the meeting, commission members will hear panel presentations from persons impacted by autism in Southern Maryland and an informational presentation by Dr. Barbara Howard and Dr. Raymond Sterner from the Center for The Promotion of Child Development through Primary Care. The members are most interested in learning more about the status of the existing education and service systems, needs that are not adequately being addressed and steps the public feels can best help the state move forward.

"Early intervention and educational services are keys to helping children with autism," said State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. "By putting a spotlight on the disorder, we believe that more parents and families will find the resources they need."

The 26-member Commission was formed in 2009 by the Maryland General Assembly (SB 963) and is chaired by DHMH Deputy Secretary Renata J. Henry and Carol Ann Heath, MSDE Assistant State Superintendent, who serves as vice chair.

"The commission is working to evaluate how to best facilitate and coordinate research opportunities among Maryland's vast institutional, educational and public health resources," said Deputy Secretary Henry. "We believe that if we can help advance serious research in all areas of autism, we will help every family that deals with autism."

People from the community will have an opportunity to comment from 11:30 am to 12:15 pm. Participants are asked to limit their presentation to no more than three minutes. For those who are unable to attend or wish to respond in writing, written testimony may be submitted prior to October 15. It can be e-mailed to Janet Furman at jfurman@dnhm.state.md.us or by mail to:

Maryland Commission on Autism
c/o Janet Furman
201 West Preston St., 4th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21201

The first meeting was held in Easton in April 2010. In July 2010 the Commission met in Hagerstown. They will meet in the Central Maryland region on January 11, 2011 with the location still to be determined.

Public health officials, educators and families have cited a growing concern over the steady increase of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The state has seen a 57 percent increase in the number of autism-related diagnoses from 2002 to 2006.

Information about meetings and the Commission can be found on the Autism Commission Web site at <http://dhmh.maryland.gov/autism/> .

The Commission is scheduled to submit preliminary findings and recommendations for a state plan to the General Assembly by June 1, 2011, with a final report due on September 30, 2012.

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Directions to the College of Southern Maryland:

To La Plata Campus, from Baltimore and other locations north

- Take I-95 South towards Washington.
- Continue on I-95 SOUTH/I-495 Capital Beltway.
- From Route I-495 Capital Beltway exit at 7A. This is Route 5, heading south toward Waldorf and Leonardtown.
- Continue on Route 5 to where it meets Route 301.
- Drive south on Route 301 for approximately 12 miles to the traffic light at the intersection of Mitchell Road.
- Turn right on Mitchell Road proceeding approximately two miles, reaching the main entrance to the campus which is on the right. Approximately one-tenth of a mile from the main entrance is the second entrance.

To La Plata Campus, from Frederick, MD and other locations west

- Take I-270 S.
- I-270 S becomes Capital Beltway/I-495 E.
- From Route I-495 E Capital Beltway exit at 7A. This is Route 5, heading south toward Waldorf and Leonardtown.
- Continue on Route 5 to where it meets Route 301.
- Drive south on Route 301 for approximately 12 miles to the traffic light at the intersection of Mitchell Road.
- Turn right on Mitchell Road proceeding approximately two miles, reaching the main entrance to the campus which is on the right. Approximately one-tenth of a mile from the main entrance is the second entrance.

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Parking lots #2 and #6 are closest to the Center for Business and Industry.

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