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Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANTHEM BLUE CROSS/BLUE SHIELD ORDERED TO PAY FOR AUTISM THERAPY

LAKESWOOD, CO — NOVEMBER 29, 2007 — A Boulder family won a hard-fought health insurance arbitration last week requiring Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield to cover more than \$110,000 of prior charges for behavioral therapy for their four-year-old child with autism.

The decision is heralded by autism advocacy groups as a giant step toward getting insurers to cover this vital treatment, which costs as much as \$60,000 per year and can take a child from requiring life-long intensive support and dependence toward a path of independence in as little as two years of therapy.

The parents, Jill and Stephen Tappert, filed for formal arbitration one year ago on behalf of their daughter, Abby, after more than one year of appeals, countless phone calls, and numerous letters with reams of attachments had not yielded results. “I hope other families are encouraged to continue this advocacy,” said Jill Tappert. “That’s what this arbitration was about – advocating for my child and her peers to get treatment critical for them to lead as healthy and happy lives as possible.”

Some of the findings in the decision include:

- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is not “experimental” and, in fact, “***is the standard of care in treating autism;***”

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- Autism is a “congenital defect” and/or “birth abnormality” and, therefore, is not subject to certain policy exclusions;
- ABA is within two coverage provisions of the PPO policy; and
- ABA is medically necessary to prevent the self-injurious and aggressive behavior that this child demonstrated.

Betty Lehman, executive director of the Autism Society of Colorado, said that while the decision was based primarily on the facts of this particular case, this case can serve as somewhat of a “blueprint” for other families to follow in advocating for their own children. “Legal rulings are used as precedent all the time,” Tappert said. “This ruling gives others one more arrow in their quiver.”

“We need everyone to understand that treating individuals with autism helps both the individual personally and everyone else,” Tappert said. “That’s what many insurance companies and legislators seem to be missing — that people who receive effective treatment are more productive members of society and are more likely to live independently.”

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Since 1970, ASC has provided leadership as an advocate for those who have autism and the systems that support them at the local, state and national levels. Located in the metro Denver area, ASC provides information and referral services, advances legislation through the Colorado legislature to increase funding for treatment and support of autism, and heightens community awareness of the need for supports and services.

ASC’s mission is to promote quality of life for people with autism spectrum disorders and their families. To achieve our mission, we educate, advocate, collaborate, legislate and develop support programs with community partners. Our website is www.autismcolorado.org.