

**NEWS RELEASE
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**Speaker's Gala to benefit nonprofit serving individuals with
developmental and learning disabilities
Proceeds go to Speaker O'Brien's Keystone Charities Fund
*April 5th event at Naval Cruise Terminal in Philadelphia Navy Yard***

PHILADELPHIA, PA. — State Rep. Dennis M. O'Brien, elected speaker of Pennsylvania's House of Representatives last year, will host the Speaker's Gala on April 5, 2008, which will raise donations to benefit people with developmental and learning disabilities.

O'Brien has started a nonprofit, Keystone Charities Fund, for individuals with such developmental and learning disabilities as autism, Asperger's syndrome, dyslexia and attention deficit disorder.

Donations to the foundation would help fund organizations, programs, schools and agencies that serve individuals with these and other developmental disorders that make learning a struggle.

"I have been blessed, and through a combination of circumstances I could never have predicted, I find myself in a position to help people with developmental disabilities and learning disabilities," O'Brien says. "To help them more than I ever dreamed I could."

O'Brien has served his Northeast Philadelphia district in the House since 1976 and has been a tireless champion of people with learning disabilities. He pushed through state funding for three regional diagnostic centers to assist the disabled and their families.

O'Brien's strong personal commitment stems from having family members with learning and developmental disabilities. His son, Dennis Jr., has dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and his nephew Christopher has autism.

The Speaker has launched www.keystonecharities.org, a website with information about these and other disorders, the foundation's mission, and a list of some of the organizations that would be beneficiaries. Visitors can also make a donation on the site.

Tickets to the Gala are \$500 and can be purchased on the website. In recognizing that individuals with developmental and learning disabilities have special needs, Gala tickets are \$250 for their family members.

The event, located in the Philadelphia Cruise Terminal Pier One at the Navy Yard, 5100 S. Broad Street, will have a cruise theme, "an extravagant maiden voyage." It will run from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Evening cruise attire is required.

The Speaker's Gala will follow a symposium that will be conducted on Friday, April 4, 2008, that addresses the needs in transitioning young adults with developmental and learning disabilities from school to the community, and the best practices to follow in working with them.

O'Brien says Keystone Charities Fund is for "those wonderful organizations, groups and individuals providing professional assistance, education and training that make a difference in the lives of Pennsylvanians with learning and developmental disabilities."

"Disabilities like autism and verbal and non-verbal dyslexia cannot be completely cured," he says. "They can only be made progressively less disabling so the individuals affected by them can learn to live with them."

Citing examples, O'Brien says, "A youngster with dyslexia or attention deficit disorder has to work twice as hard as a typical child to read and re-read, to study and re-study, to earn the grades that will enable him or her to get and hold a good job or go to college.

"Someone on the autism spectrum has a multiplicity of disabling characteristics, in communication and sensory deficits. Yet, today, as a result of therapeutic advances and appropriate education, every person with autism can achieve higher levels of ability to cope with today's complex world.

"People with developmental and learning disabilities did not choose the personal challenges they face, but they are learning through patience, support and research to overcome them. They need and deserve our help."

Keystone Charities Fund is a public charity and therefore classified by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization, which exempts all charitable contributions to the foundation from federal income tax.