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Western's Evaluation Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders (WECAN) Ribbon Cutting

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Good afternoon and welcome to a new period in our state's ability to assess and deliver services to young people with autism spectrum and neurodevelopmental disorders.

It's my pleasure to welcome some very special guests.
- Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, whose commitment to the special education needs and services of Michigan families is unpatrolled.
- State Sen. Margaret O'Brien (I'll say a bit more about here in a moment)
- State Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker
- (Other legislators), and
- Lisa Grost, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Manager of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Program,

Today, it's appropriate to say "Welcome Back," since many of your were with us--just next door at our College of Health and Human Services--last year, when Sen. Margaret O'Brien announced a special appropriation to WMU to build on its years of service and international reputation in behavior analysis to boost Michigan's capacity to offer needed autism services in a timely manner.

Sen. Obrien noted at the time that the dire need for additional professional to meet the needs of families could not wait and for young people and their families, the need is now. The solution, as she said that day, was right in her backyard at Western Michigan University and its Department of Psychology, which enjoys an international reputation for providing leadership in the field.
• A lot has happened since then and the pace of efforts in this field is escalating quickly under the guidance of our Autism Center of Excellence. That's important because families don't have the luxury of waiting for assistance. The need is immediate. So we're using technology to boost training opportunities for professionals and we're engaged on multiple tracks to meet needs. Just last month, we settled on a new location for an expanded Kalamazoo Autism Center that will provide needed space to provide some of the treatment services that this new center--WECAN--might recommend to families.

• This new center is an important tool that will allow our faculty and staff to put their worldwide reputation to work on behalf of families and schools in a way that will significantly move the needle as our state and communities work to improve both the quality and timeliness of autism-related services. Years of research and service in applying behavior analysis to the field will mean families will see an expansion of the support and training that will improve quality of life.

• Thank you for joining us for this important moment. And thank you for all that you are doing to meet the needs of Michigan young people and their families.