

One World Center for Autism, Inc.

Linking those living with autism to their world



www.worldforautism.org

7401 Forbes Blvd, Suite A

Phone: 301-618-8395

Fax: 301-618-8396

Email: info@worldforautism.org

HOUSE BILL 598: Maryland Medical Assistance Program –Applied Behavior Analysis Services–Reimbursement

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 9, 2021

POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Committee:

The One World Center for Autism is a non-profit organization that provides Healthcare, Family Support, Individual Support and Community Outreach Services for children, youth and their families living with autism in Prince George’s County, Maryland, and neighboring communities. I am grateful to have founded our organization with other parents and professionals who have a passion for improving the quality of life for those living with autism in our county. As a mother of 5 children, three of whom have autism and a pediatrician for over 22 years, I am in full support of House Bill 598 which seeks to prohibit the Maryland Department of Health from conditioning reimbursement of applied behavior analysis (ABA) provided to Maryland Medical Assistance Program recipients based on the presence or availability of a parent.

ABA is one of the foundational supports for children, youth, and adults with autism. When available to individuals and their families; and offered with flexibility this intervention can have a tremendously positive impact on the social- emotional development of those affected. Unfortunately, the availability of this service is extremely limited for many of the families I serve. Our population is largely African American and Latino in origin and most are covered by Medicaid. Not only are children and youth of color with autism diagnosed later but many are often misdiagnosed with other conditions. This is the first hurdle that our families must overcome when accessing life-changing supports. The second hurdle is access to quality services due to a shortage in ABA providers who accept Medicaid due to low reimbursements and the mandate for parent presence during Medicaid covered ABA.

Autism is at its core a social disability. For those affected by autism to develop social skills that empower them and their ability to navigate life, we must have ABA services that provide opportunities for social skills development and behavioral regulation which are independent of caregiver presence and in relationship with their peers. The caregiver mandate makes this impossible and creates dependency on caregiver instead of independence. Additionally, the caregiver/ parent mandate creates two tiers of ABA services. The first tier of services (offered by private insurers) is flexible and creative in its implementation and promotion of skills

acquisition, behavioral modification, and independence. The second tier (Medicaid covered) is limited, restrictive and inaccessible to those that need it the most. Lastly, for many Medicaid recipients who are also lower income, the parent mandate limits their employment which places a greater strain on families, who historically experience greater levels of psychological and financial stress.

In closing, I respectfully ask that you vote in favor of HB 598 and create greater access and opportunities for creative acquisition of social-emotional skills through ABA that lead to greater independence and adult quality of life. More importantly we must never create inequity for children based on socioeconomic status that places them at a disadvantage from day one of their diagnosis.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for more information, please contact Abila Tazanu, M.D, Executive Director, One World Center for Autism at 301-618-8395 (Cell-301-957-1382) or abila@worldforautism.org..