



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:

Pathfinders for Autism (PFA) is Maryland's largest autism organization dedicated to helping individuals, parents, and professionals find resources, support, and training while working to increase the awareness of autism spectrum disorders. We accomplish this through a variety of programs and services, all of which are offered FREE of charge. Last year our programs served over 19,300 people.

PFA supports 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 a common behavioral health therapy that helps people with autism reach their full potential in areas including education, employment, independent living, and life satisfaction. Some children may require intensive ABA therapy, up to 40 hours per week.

The arbitrary requirement for a parent to be present and available creates inequity in access to medical care between those with private insurance sold in Maryland and recipients of Medicaid. This burdensome requirement puts parents in the position of having to choose between work or other family responsibilities and getting medically necessary treatment for their children with autism.

One in 52 Maryland children are diagnosed with autism.¹ There are over 12,500 children in Maryland public schools with an autism diagnosis.² One third of children in Maryland are covered by Medicaid.³ The requirement that a parent be present and available for services is NOT clinically necessary or appropriate; is NOT a requirement under the 2014 mandate that ABA services be covered by policies sold in Maryland; and is NOT included in the Medicaid State Plan Amendment approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in 2017. Maryland Medicaid has perpetuated a system of care that benefits the most privileged in our state while creating systemic barriers for thousands of the most vulnerable.

Beyond the issue of equity, this requirement is fiscally irresponsible. It forces a family to choose between employment or treatment. Employment that may reduce the need for public assistance programs or treatment that could, over time, reduce the child's need for special education services and/or adult service programs covered by the state.

Nothing about this requirement makes clinical, equitable, or fiscal sense. I respectfully ask that you vote in favor of HB 598 and create greater access and equity for the growing number of children with autism. For more information, please contact Rebecca Rienzi, Executive Director, Pathfinders for Autism at 443-330-5370 or rrienzi@pathfindersforautism.org.

¹ Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network 2020 report

² Maryland State Department of Education 2018 Special Education Census Data

³ Kaiser Family Foundation 2018 State Medicaid Report