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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 627- Maryland Medical Assistance Program –
Registered Behavior Technicians – Reimbursement
February 23, 2022**

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 627 which will require the Maryland Department of Health to establish a 90 day grace period for obtaining a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) credential. Registered Behavior Technicians provide Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy to children and young adults diagnosed with autism. This grace period will allow employers to hire these entry-level hourly employees and provide on the job training to help them obtain the RBT credential.

As this committee knows, ABA is the gold standard for early autism treatment and is crucial to help children reach their full potential. Last year we passed legislation to increase access to ABA therapy for families with Medicaid by prohibiting the Department of Health from requiring a parental presence during treatment. HB 627 represents the next step in increasing the behavioral workforce so that more children with Medicaid can access ABA treatment in a timely manner.

Per Maryland law behavior technicians, whether they have earned the RBT credential or not, can only provide ABA therapy if under the ongoing supervision of a Licensed Behavior Analyst (LBA). In the clinical setting RBT's function is similar to a paraprofessional in the classroom who only works under the supervision of a licensed teacher.

Earning a RBT certification is an intensive and multi-step process. After the initial hire, an aspiring technician undergoes a background check, forty hours of training, and then a skills competency assessment. After successfully completing the training and skills assessment, applicants then submit proof of a high school diploma, training participation and passage of the

skills assessment to the national Behavior Analyst Credentialing Board (BACB). The BACB then verifies that the applicant is eligible to sit for the RBT exam. After that verification, the exam must be scheduled, taken and passed and then the applicant will be issued a certificate by BACB. Under current Maryland Medicaid regulations, all of this must take place before they can begin providing services to clients.

Even if an applicant passes the exam on the first try and there are zero delays in processing applications, exam timing or certificate issuance, this process can take more than 45 days. In reality, the process often takes more than double that timeframe. National statistics indicate that up to 15% of applicants do not pass the test on the first try. In part, this is because the test is highly technical and challenging to pass. Further, it is currently offered only in English, putting non-native speakers at a disadvantage.

As an emergency measure during the pandemic, the Department of Health suspended the RBT credentialing requirement and allowed technicians to provide services before completing the certification process. This suspension resulted in increased access to care, improved clinical quality, and decreased wait times for therapy to begin. In addition, it increased technician understanding and skill development prior to the RBT examination. Anecdotally, the additional on the job training increased employee retention and exam pass rates.

Once Maryland Medicaid reinstated the RBT certification requirement in July 2021, wait times for services increased again, particularly for Spanish speaking families. At one Medicaid ABA provider in my district, wait times increased from 30 days to more than 90 days. Research shows that the earlier ABA therapies can begin the better the outcome for long term quality of life. The delays caused by this workforce shortage are life altering for families. Providing a 90 day window to complete the certification process will help ABA providers address the workforce shortage within this industry.

It is important to note that this requirement only applies to Medicaid providers. Private insurance does not have a similar requirement and allows on the job training while working towards the RBT credential. As a result of their requirements, families who have private insurance do not typically have long wait times that families on Medicaid have. Enacting similar requirements for Medicaid providers will allow low-income families to obtain the high-quality care they need, when they need it. HB 627 does not lower quality of care.

I urge a favorable report of this legislation.