

DATE: February 09, 2025

TO: Representative Elmer

RE: HB 2023

FROM: Tamara Bakewell

I am writing to express my support for HB 2023. Applied Behavior Analysis is an appropriate option for many children with intellectual or developmental disabilities to learn health-related skills, manage anxiety, and communicate better.

Previously, in another state, I was the administrator of an early childhood program that used ABA as its core therapy. We enrolled students with autism spectrum disorder and other diagnoses, referred by that states' Developmental Disabilities' system. The children ranged in age from 18 months to 9 years old.

In the years I ran the program, here are a few things I've learned:

- ABA is best used to help children manage behaviors that limit, frustrate, or impede development. For example, it can help children
 - Reduce unhelpful rigidity so they can manage transitions and new situations
 - Reduce fears and anxieties, including food anxiety
- When children have unsafe behaviors, such as bolting or climbing, ABA is a useful tool for teaching safety instructions such as 'wait' and 'stop'. It can also be used to help children learn toileting and handwashing, reducing spread of germs.
- ABA is an efficient way to teach children skills they will need for school, such as walking in line, sitting in a circle, making music, and being on the playground.
- Not all children need ABA, and it is not always needed forever. ABA is individualized.
- The best ABA programs involve and include caregivers; families should avoid programs where caregivers are not actively welcome to participate in goal setting.

I would describe ABA therapy as "diagnostic agnostic". It helps children eliminate unsafe behaviors and learn new skills regardless of their official 'diagnosis'.

Without this bill I worry that insurance companies will reflexively deny ABA therapy, causing unnecessary delay and hardship as families struggle to keep children safe and healthy. The appeal process is costly for all parties. Ideally, there should be no need for this bill since if a child's treatment is medically necessary there should be no question of coverage. But until that time, I urge the passage of HB 2023.

Thank you, Representative Elmer, for this work to provide equitable care of *all* Oregon children who need access to Applied Behavior Analysis treatment, regardless of diagnosis.

