

Submitter: Jeni Canaday
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB729

Dear Representatives,

As the parent of a fine young Autistic man, who is a non traditional communicator, and was denied mental health care for years due to his diagnosis, I am writing in support of SB 729.

When he was young, and struggling with his mental health, the only intervention that was available to us was Applied Behavior Analysis, which is a behavior modification modality that does not look deeply into why a distress behavior may be happening, and instead focuses on modifying the externalized behavior and training Autistic children into compliance. This intervention is now well known to cause PTSD, but back when it was brought to me as the only option, I was not given informed consent. Parents still do not get informed consent around the potential for PTSD.

I ended up pulling my son out of ABA because it was inhumane, and only made things worse. I was told that he would not benefit from mental health therapy because of his disabilities, but in truth, they would not consider him because of ableism, which was showing up in the form of a lack of ability to presume competence.

Unfortunately, my son is now one of the thousands of ABA survivor with PTSD.

Which just led to him being even more in need of mental health supports.

It was not easy, there were many, many barriers in the way, but eventually my refined advocacy skills paid off, and I found a skilled and experienced mental health therapist who was willing to see him. With the removal of behavior interventions and addition of robust mental health care, he began to heal.

He is now happy and thriving adult who goes to work every day and enjoys recreating with his family. With the right help, he has become masterful at managing his PTSD triggers. He is wise, and kind, and more insightful than most. If we would have stayed on the behavior modification track, I believe my son may have died from head banging, and/or been institutionalized.

Seeing him as a whole thinking and feeling human, and honoring his need for the same mental health supports as anyone else, saved his life.

If we are truly here to unpack systemic ableism, we must ensure the ID/DD community has access and choice when it comes to mental health care. This is their human right.