



February 12th, 2025

Representative Rob Nosse
900 Court St. NE, H-277
Salem, Oregon 97301

Subject: Opposition to HB2023 – Health Insurance Coverage for ABA

Representative Nosse and members of the Committee on Behavioral Health and Healthcare,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 2023, which seeks to expand health insurance coverage for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) to additional categories of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Epilepsy.

As the Executive Director of the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint (AASR), I feel compelled to share our concerns about this proposed legislation. AASR is a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to eliminating the use of punitive and exclusionary discipline in schools across the United States. Our mission is to inform changes in policy and practice to reduce and eliminate the use of punitive discipline and outdated behavioral management approaches.

While ABA is often touted as the “gold standard” for autism intervention, there are significant ethical and practical concerns about its use:

1. **Trauma and Mental Health Concerns:** Research has shown a high prevalence of posttraumatic stress symptoms in individuals who have undergone ABA therapy. A 2018 study found that 46% of ABA-exposed respondents met the diagnostic threshold for PTSD, with 47% of the affected



subgroup experiencing extreme levels of severity.

2. **Focus on Compliance:** ABA's emphasis on compliance can be psychologically and physically abusive. A 2019 paper noted that forcing individuals to engage in unnatural behaviors, such as maintaining eye contact despite physiological discomfort, constitutes a form of abuse.
3. **Masking and Mental Health:** The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN) has highlighted that teaching children to hide or mask their autistic traits has been linked to worse mental health outcomes and increased suicidality in autistic adults.
4. **Questionable Effectiveness:** A 2020 Department of Defense report concluded that "ABA services are not working for most TRICARE beneficiaries." In a study of over 709 autistic individuals, 76% showed no improvement after one year of treatment, while 9% actually worsened.
5. **Ethical Concerns:** The roots of ABA in the work of Ivar Lovaas raise serious ethical questions. Lovaas's involvement in conversion therapy and his dehumanizing views of autistic individuals are deeply troubling.

Expanding ABA coverage to children with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Epilepsy is not only unnecessary but potentially harmful. These conditions have distinct needs that are best addressed through interventions that respect the individual's dignity and neurodiversity.

Instead of expanding ABA coverage, I urge the committee to consider investing in trauma-informed, neuroscience-aligned, and relationship-driven approaches that support the unique needs of all children with disabilities. These approaches should prioritize the well-being, autonomy, and self-determination of individuals rather than focusing on behavior modification.

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In conclusion, I strongly urge you to reject HB2023. We realize the intent of this bill may be to provide help and support, but the impact could be harmful even if well-intentioned. Let us instead work towards more ethical, effective, and respectful ways of supporting children with disabilities that align with our current understanding of neurodiversity and trauma-informed care.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Guy Stephens
Executive Director
Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint