



State Representative Scott Lipps

Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 159

Chairman Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 159, legislation that would create better accountability for provisions of Applied Behavior Analysis therapy used to treat autism spectrum disorder.

Autism impacts an estimated 1 in 36 children in the United States. There are approximately 59,534 children with autism spectrum disorder living in Ohio. Many subtypes of autism exist and are influenced by a variety of genetic and environmental factors. Since autism is a spectrum, each person has a unique set of strengths and challenges. Some people with ASD may require significant support in their daily lives while others may live their lives completely independent.

Research shows that early intervention leads to more positive outcomes later in life for people with ASD. Applied Behavior Analysis is an evidence-based theory that helps autistic individuals improve daily living skills, intellectual functioning, language development, and social functioning. The US Surgeon General and American Psychological Association consider ABA to be a best practice treatment having passed scientific test of its usefulness, quality, and effectiveness. More than 20 studies have established that intensive and long-term therapy improves outcomes for many, not all, children with autism.

Ohio is one of a few states that have not fully implemented ABA as a state covered service. The current system presents challenges for families and providers with Medicaid Managed Care Plans. Families enrolled in Ohio Medicaid may be facing barriers to access this potentially life altering therapy.

HB159 would require the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) to issue a annual report to the Ohio General Assembly regarding access to ABA for Medicaid-enrolled children with autism. The report must be submitted by December 31st each year, beginning the year after the bill's effective date. This annual report would include:

- The Number of Certified Behavior Analysts practicing in the state, who are enrolled Medicaid providers.
- The number of Medicaid-enrolled children with autism who have received ABA.
- The number of Medicaid-enrolled children with autism who were denied coverage despite it being recommended by their medical provider.
- The number of prior authorization requests for ABA that were denied and the number of appeals resulting from those denials and partial denials.

The bill would also require ODM to provide recommendations in the report about how to improve the Medicaid network of ABA providers and access to applied behavior analysis.

This data is already being collected by ODM and this legislation simply requests them to report their findings back to the General Assembly. This is one additional way to increase transparency for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

I am happy to report that since the creation of HB159, Medicaid has been a great partner. They have assured us that changes are on there way to this system, and I would like to commend them for working collaboratively with us. We are not sure if the bill will continue to be needed however, we wanted to help draw attention to this issue for all Ohioans.

Thank you Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, and Ranking Member Brewer, I can now take any questions you might have.