

Marla Root, Founder and CEO
Senate Medicaid Committee
Testimony on HB 96 (SFY 2026-27 Operating Budget)
May 9, 2025

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 96, the state operating budget for state fiscal years 2026-2027.

I am Marla Root, founder and CEO of the Ohio Autism Insurance Coalition. Our Coalition is a statewide autism service provider and advocacy network representing over 50 private businesses and non-profits that provide community-based autism services throughout Ohio. I am also the parent of Eli Root, who is a 29-year-old adult with severe autism.

Our provider network employs thousands of people and provides evidence-based treatment services to many Ohioans with autism who have Medicaid health insurance. Many of our providers are nationally accredited and strive to offer high-quality services in every community. Today, more Ohioans of all ages with autism need behavioral health services, yet most have difficulty accessing care due to the lack of available providers.

Per state data, only 8% of Medicaid-eligible children with autism are getting access to the most prescribed treatment for autism, called applied behavior analysis or ABA Therapy.

55% of Medicaid and non-Medicaid providers would serve more Medicaid children and open more centers if the ABA coverage were stabilized.

Autistic children, adolescents, and young adults are finding a strained and inadequate Medicaid provider network that cannot meet service demands. Our Coalition requests your support for our three state budget amendments to improve access to evidence-based behavioral services, such as applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy, the most prescribed and recognized by the American Medical Association for treating ASD.

The EPSDT Medicaid mandate states, *“Children’s health problems should be addressed before they become advanced, and treatment is more difficult and costly.”* As stated before, Ohio’s Medicaid-eligible children with autism are not getting access to critical services. Ohio still does not have codified ABA coverage in the administrative code or a state plan amendment, even though families have won lawsuits in 2008 and 2012. In 2014, the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare issued a [memo](#) telling Medicaid departments to cover ABA therapy.

Currently, Ohio Medicaid has no uniform medical or reimbursement policies for ABA therapy. There are seven different medical policies for ABA therapy right now. ABA providers state that over 50% of all ABA therapy authorizations for treating autism are forced to have a peer-to-peer medical review before they are approved or denied. Inconsistent medical necessity criteria between the seven managed care plans and an inadequate provider network are driving a lack of access to care, which violates patient protections found in both the federal parity law (MHPAEA) and Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) mandate.

Medicaid-eligible children with autism face challenges accessing care outside the big three C cities. There are no codified reimbursement rate schedules in Ohio rules, and Medicaid has not issued any guidance on reimbursement since 2018. ABA providers did not see increased reimbursement rates as community behavioral health centers did recently. Our Coalition supports the Ohio Council's request for a 5% reimbursement increase in this year's budget. Many people with autism receive counseling, psychiatry, and treatment services through community mental health centers.

We know the Department of Medicaid is working to release finalized rules for ABA coverage, but this has been pushed out over and over the past two years. For 2025, it was first April, then July, and now it has been pushed to the fall.

We can't wait; Medicaid coverage for ABA therapy is unstable, with many children not getting the treatment they were prescribed and need. **We need your support for our three-state amendment proposals to stabilize the ABA therapy coverage within Medicaid.**

- 1) Need Medicaid's New Fee-for-Service Reimbursement for ABA to begin July 1, 2025.
 - a. We know Medicaid is not ready with the coverage rules for ABA, but Medicaid has already released its new ABA reimbursement rates developed by an actuarial firm
- 2) Moratorium on Reduction of ABA Reimbursement Rates by managed care plans.
 - a. We need the new Medicaid rates, plus we are requesting that it be two years before MCOs can reduce these rates through contract negotiations with providers. We have seen this in other mental health services in the past.
- 3) Allow Competent Behavior Technicians to Deliver Services while completing national certification.
 - a. A Behavior Technician is a direct care professional who has completed the required 40-hour training and successfully passed the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) competency assessment supervised by a certified behavior analyst, which takes about 4 to 6 weeks, and should be able to deliver and receive reimbursement for ABA. If RBT certification is not achieved by the 121st day of active employment, the behavior technician can no longer deliver services until the certification is achieved.

Please note:

- (1) Our amendment requests do not impact the state budget financially.
- (2) ABA did not receive a rate increase with OHMAS' Community Behavioral Health Centers (CBHCs) last year and is not a part of the current request for a 5% increase for CBHCs.
- (3) Medicaid's current budget includes the new ABA fee-for-service reimbursement.

Our Coalition looks forward to working with the DeWine Administration and lawmakers during this budget process to ensure children with autism get access to critical care by stabilizing and supporting the autism behavioral health provider network. Supporting healthy reimbursement and stabilizing service delivery will support service expansion within Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati.

Our simple amendments are already in Medicaid's current budget and will support Ohio in offering a healthy, productive workforce that continues to attract more businesses and offer good-paying jobs, so every child can reach their full potential and, of course, reduce future support needs.

Members of the Ohio Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for this opportunity, and again, we request your consideration of our three-state amendment proposals to stabilize the ABA therapy coverage within Medicaid. We request that you please submit our amendments to LSC.

Thank you for your time and consideration today.

Organizations in Support of Our Three State Budget Amendments to Support Access to Care

Milestones Autism Resources of Cleveland

Autism Speaks

Autism Society of Greater Akron

Autism Society of Mahoning Valley

Autism Society of Greater Cleveland

Autism Society of Dayton

Autism Society of Northwest Ohio

Autism Society of Central Ohio

The Positivity Spectrum

Acronym Definitions

ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder

COBA/BCBA – Ohio Certified Behavior Analyst or Board Certified Behavior Analyst (main ABA practitioner)

BACB – Behavior Analyst Certification Board

ABA – Applied Behavior Analysis. Behavior Analysis is the science of behavior. ABA Therapy is the most prescribed evidence-based treatment for ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder.

MHPAEA - Federal Mental Health Parity Law (patient protection)

EPSDT – Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment Medicaid Mandate (patient protection)

CMS - Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (federal government)

MCP – Managed Care Plans within Medicaid

ODM – Ohio Department of Medicaid

OHABA – Ohio Association for Behavior Analysis, the Ohio-specific practitioner association for Behavior Analyst (BCBA/COBA)

Behavior Analyst Certification Board (2020). *Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts* <https://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Ethics-Code-for-Behavior-Analysts-230119-a.pdf>

Council for Autism Service Providers (CASP) (2020). *Applied Behavior Analysis Treatment of Autism Spectrum*

Disorder: Practice Guidelines for Healthcare Funders and Manager, generally accepted standards of care,

https://assets-002.noviams.com/novi-file-uploads/casp/pdfs-and-documents/ASD_Guidelines/ABA-ASD-Practice-Guidelines.pdf

ABA Coding Coalition (2022). *Model Coverage for ABA or Adaptive Behavior Services*, <https://abacodes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Model-Coverage-Policy-for-ABA-01.25.2022.pdf>