

May 12, 2025

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in written format. My name is Donald Gallagher, and I am the founder of SparkJoy ABA LLC, a Northeast Ohio provider of applied behavior analysis, or ABA therapy. I'm here today to ask for your support of three important Medicaid budget amendments that are essential to preserving access to care for children with autism.

At SparkJoy ABA, we are committed to serving as many Medicaid families as we can, and we prioritize reaching children in rural and underserved communities across our region. For many of these families, we are one of the few options available. We work hard to meet their needs, but the current structure and reimbursement system under Medicaid is making that increasingly difficult—and frankly, unsustainable. I'm not sure how long we will be able to continue to serve Medicaid members as-is.

ABA therapy is not experimental. It is the most evidence-based, widely recommended treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorders. It reduces the severity of symptoms and supports long-term independence, significantly decreasing the future costs to public systems like education, social services, and health care. Yet despite its proven value, only 8% of Medicaid-eligible children with autism in Ohio are receiving it.

Access to ABA therapy under Medicaid is unstable. Providers like us are navigating seven different sets of medical policies across the managed care plans. These inconsistencies result in delays, denials, and constant peer-to-peer reviews—even when services are clearly medically necessary. It's a broken system, and the families we serve are the ones paying the price.

Meanwhile, other behavioral health providers have received rate increases over the years. ABA providers have not. The current rates are outdated and do not reflect the cost of delivering ethical, quality services. We are a workforce-driven field, and as wages rise and compliance demands increase, we cannot keep up at these rates. Without meaningful change, more providers will leave the Medicaid network, and the children who need care the most will be left with nowhere to turn.

We know the Department of Medicaid is working on coverage rules for ABA, but this has been delayed multiple times over the past two years. We cannot wait any longer. To stabilize access to ABA therapy in Ohio, I urge your support for the following three amendments:

1. ****Start Medicaid's New Fee-for-Service Reimbursement Rates on July 1, 2025.****

These rates were developed by an actuarial firm and are ready to go. We need them implemented this summer to prevent further collapse of the provider network.

2. ****Establish a Two-Year Moratorium on Managed Care Organizations Lowering ABA Rates.****

Give providers a two-year window where these new rates cannot be negotiated down. This kind of stabilization is essential to keeping providers like us in the Medicaid system.

3. ****Allow Trained Behavior Technicians to Deliver Services While Finalizing Certification.****

After completing their required training and initial competency assessment under a supervising BCBA, behavior technicians should be allowed to provide care and be reimbursed for up to 120 days while they complete RBT certification. This will help address the workforce shortage while maintaining quality.

Members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you again for your time and consideration. Please consider submitting our amendment requests to the Legislative Service Commission. I would be happy to share the proposed language and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald Gallagher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line to the right of the name.

Donald Gallagher
President
SparkJoyABA LLC