

Before the Senate Health Committee

Proponent Testimony of Ohio Association for Behavior Analysis on HB 122

By Jen Gonda, MEd, BCBA, COBA

September 29, 2021

Good afternoon, Chairman Huffman and members of the Health Committee. My name is Jen Gonda and I am here today on behalf of the Ohio Association for Behavior Analysis to support House Bill 122, regarding the provision of telehealth services. Throughout this pandemic, Ohio health care providers have shown resilience and ingenuity in order to provide needed services to their clients through the use of telehealth. The use of telehealth over the past year has redefined the need for in person services across many disciplines. Additionally, the advancements and research into telehealth have proven time and again that it is a viable, and often better, alternative to the traditional healthcare model of in person services. Telehealth provides the flexibility and access that all Ohioans deserve.

A discipline that has thrived with the use of telehealth is applied behavior analysis, often referred to as ABA. ABA is a treatment based on the science of behavior. ABA practitioners evaluate the environmental influences on the likelihood of people engaging in specific behaviors with the goal to increase desirable behavior and decrease behavior that is harmful or could impede everyday living and learning. Within Ohio, ABA is most practiced with children with autism and is considered the gold standard for autism treatment according to the CDC, the US Surgeon General, and countless other organizations. Additionally, ABA practitioners are working in our schools, our congregate settings for adults with disabilities and seniors, and are side by side with other mental health practitioners in order to improve the lives of Ohioans.

From the young child just diagnosed with autism to the adult engaging in self injurious behavior in their group home, the continuity of ABA interventions is vital. At the onset of the pandemic, ABA services were included in the emergency health declarations allowing telehealth and these services provided for continued access to essential care through ABA consultation, parent training, and direct treatment. There is research to support ongoing telehealth ABA services in order to provide greater access to ABA.

In Ohio, ABA practitioners are certified under The Ohio Board of Psychology. Certified Ohio behavior analysts, known as COBAs, practiced telehealth in Ohio under the emergency health declarations. However, COBAs are not a listed practitioner in this bill. Continued access to telehealth for ABA services is vital for Ohio. Most COBAs are centralized around urban areas and therefore telehealth facilitates access to ABA in rural areas of our state. Telehealth decreases the barriers to parent training and ABA consultation for working families or families with children that struggle just leaving the house. Additionally, telehealth allows for in-the-moment ABA consultation for parents when their child is struggling with challenging behavior. This type of access would not be possible without telehealth.

Including COBAs in House Bill 122 is supported by the Ohio Board of Psychology and the Ohio Psychological Association. The Ohio Association for Behavior Analysis supports House Bill 122 with the addition of COBAs as a listed health care practitioner. Again, we believe HB 122 is good public policy and moving us in the right direction. However, without the inclusion of COBAs as one of the health practices, you will be excluding a large number of Ohioans from the benefit of telehealth at a time when it is in great demand. Therefore, we urge you to amend HB 122 to include COBAs as an eligible practice area and to pass the bill. Thank you so much for your time today and I welcome any questions regarding ABA.