

April 4, 2013

Senate Health Care Committee Hearing: SB365

Oral Testimony

Chairwoman Anderson and members of this committee, my name is Eric Riehl, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to share our family's experience with the powerful results of applied behavior analysis.

My daughter, Elie, is now 15 years old. She has autism, and unfortunately, like many individuals with autism she suffers from self-injurious behavior. When she was 11 years old we had to make the wrenching decision to place her in a group home. Her self-injury was so severe that she needed two people next to her at all times. We hoped that her group home agency and DHS would have the resources and expertise to help her.

Three years later Elie was spending her time wrapped up in a blanket from her neck to below her knees during all waking hours. She was still hitting herself 600 times per day. It was obvious to us that we needed to seek outside help. Dr. Cynthia Anderson, a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and licensed psychologist at University of Oregon told us about an inpatient program at Johns Hopkins in Maryland. This specialized program where Dr. Anderson had worked as a therapist uses advanced ABA techniques to determine the function of problem behaviors and develop treatment targeted to those functions.

Johns Hopkins achieved unimagined success for Elie. After a 5 month admission her self-injury has decreased by over 90%. She has her life back. She enjoys long walks to the park, riding her bicycle, swinging and playing with water. All things she couldn't do before because she didn't want to move or even see her hands.

The bad news is that we don't have access to such comprehensive ABA services here in Oregon because insurers are refusing to pay for it. The only reason our insurance company eventually agreed to pay for treatment was due to the medical consequences of Elie's severe self-injury.

Instead of attracting top professionals to Oregon, we are losing them, including Dr. Cynthia Anderson, who had a vision for providing a clinic like Johns Hopkins here in Oregon, but couldn't make it go because of lack of insurance coverage for ABA.

Please help attract Board Certified Behavior Analysts to Oregon by requiring insurers to pay for ABA. Oregonians shouldn't have to have a medical crisis and fly across the country to get help for their loved ones with autism.

Sincerely,

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