



February 17, 2021

Committee on Health Care
Oregon Senate

RE: Support of SB 355 and SB 358

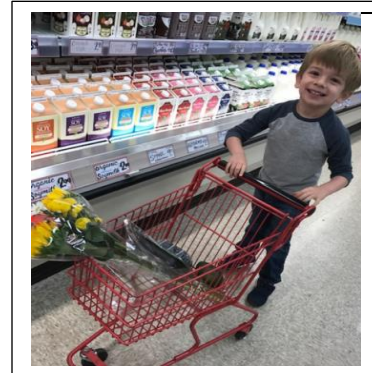
Dear Chair Patterson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB 355 and a slightly modified version of SB 358, two bills related to autism and applied behavior analysis (ABA).

Autism Speaks is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. We do this through advocacy and support, increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism spectrum disorder, and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism and related comorbidities.

In 2013, Autism Speaks was part of a coalition of organizations and individuals in Oregon that worked with legislative champions to pass then-SB 365, Autism Health Insurance Reform. That bill ensured coverage of ABA and other medically-necessary autism services, within state-regulated health insurance plans, and it passed unanimously. Autism Speaks has been an organizational leader in such important insurance coverage legislation in all fifty states, and we thank you for past support as well as current.

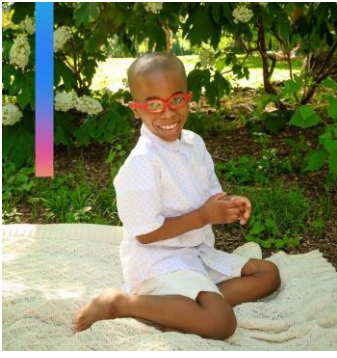
As you know, ABA is a common and often life-changing behavioral health therapy for individuals with autism and their families. Together with other prescribed services for some autistic children and adults, such as occupational therapy and/or speech therapy, ABA helps people with autism reach their full potential in areas including education, employment, independent living, and life satisfaction.



“The new year signified a fresh start and a reason to celebrate for our family: our 7-year-old son, Owen, who was diagnosed with autism at 19 months, returned from winter break to his first FULL DAY in a mainstream, general education classroom. In his words, “It was awesome!”

Now, it may be difficult for families without children on the spectrum to understand why this was such an important day for us but trust me – this was huge! This is a moment that he’s worked for since he was diagnosed. Nearly six years of 20+ hours of [ABA] therapy a week....working through more challenges than we even knew existed: being non-verbal, echolalia, scripting, teeth grinding, transitions, meltdowns, stimming, splinter skills and difficulty with gross and fine motor skills.

And finally, in 2021, it happened! Owen’s first full day in a general education classroom was a success! We share O’s story because early intervention/diagnosis was so instrumental in bringing him to this awesome day.”



"As a mom, I felt a lack of understanding and connection with my son, Kenden, better known as Mr. K. I knew something was missing from our relationship. He was nonverbal with screaming and crying as his only form of communicating.

His behaviors were very impulsive and uncontrollable. He would hit, kick, bite, throw himself into doors, walls, or fall on the floor. I had no clue how to handle or help him. Kenden's autism journey began at the age of 2.

His diagnosis provided a relief. It gave me permission to stop holding my breath and to breathe. I knew this would be work but I was definitely up for the challenge and welcomed it.

Now, Kenden is a thriving 8-year-old little boy. His smile is contagious, and his self-confidence will give you strength. He defines the saying 'if there is a will, there is a way!'"

SB 355 would delay sunseting of the autism services insurance requirement, keeping critical care covered that improves the lives of individuals with autism and their families. Provision of these services as needed/prescribed, especially when starting at a young age soon after an autism diagnosis, often saves money in the long run due to increased productivity and reduced long-term costs for more extensive special education and/or health care & home and community-based services.

SB 358 would add providers of ABA therapy to a list of other health care professionals subject to certain patient protection laws, such as mandatory child abuse reporting. We support the version of this bill (with the -1 amendment) that does not change the title of registered behavior analysis interventionists.

I urge your yes votes on SB 355 and SB 358, both in support of the autism community and individuals' rights to reach their full potential and to be protected along the way. Thanks very much.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Headrick".

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