

Submitter: Marie McMahon

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2421

Dear Chair Nosse and members of the committee,

I'm writing to ask you to support HB2421 – which fixes critical licensing and regulatory issues with the practice of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy in Oregon, and enhances patient safety.

I am a member of the Behavior Analysis Regulatory Board, which regulates certain ABA providers. I write not as a member of that board, but rather in my personal capacity as a psychologist treating patients with autism and other behavioral health conditions.

I am a licensed Psychologist in Oregon and Washington. My work has specialized in Autism and other developmental disabilities for more than 20 years. My earliest work was as an ABA therapist and supervisor. After becoming licensed as a psychologist I had a private practice offering direct clinical therapy; my current work is conducting developmental, cognitive and behavioral health evaluations. Having this broad experience for such a specialized area offers some unique insights for ABA therapy and strengthens my concerns regarding the need for fixes to the current licensing and regulation of ABA therapy in Oregon.

ABA therapy is very important for many individuals with autism and other behavioral health conditions, to improve attention, focus, and communication skills; and to decrease problem behaviors. There are currently over 1,800 professionals licensed or registered to practice ABA therapy in the state of Oregon – providing essential behavioral health services for thousands of people.

HB2421 fixes critical gaps and issues with licensing and regulation of ABA therapy in Oregon, and improves patient safety. Here are a few of the critical issues that HB2421 will fix:

Child abuse reporting: unlike essentially every other professional that has any contact with children, ABA therapists are currently exempt from the responsibility to report child abuse. Even dog catchers in Oregon must report child abuse – but not ABA therapists.

Gay conversion therapy: Oregon prohibits the harmful practice of gay conversion therapy to attempt to change a child's sexual orientation by psychologists, social workers, professional counselors, and occupational therapists – but NOT by ABA

therapists.

Professional misconduct by ABA interventionists: due to a drafting error, the Health Licensing Office currently has NO authority to discipline the Registered Behavior Analysis Interventionists who work most closely with disabled children, without direct supervision. This means that even if an interventionist is convicted of abusing a patient, there is no way to even rescind their registration authorizing them to practice ABA.

Duty to report unprofessional conduct, arrests, and convictions: Oregon requires all other health professionals to report prohibited or unprofessional conduct by other licensees or their own criminal convictions – but not ABA therapists.

Please support HB2421.

Sincerely,

Marie McMahon PsyD
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