

February 27, 2017

Dear Mr. Chair and Members, my name is Idil Abdull and I am an autism mom and advocate. First, I would like to thank the Chair – Sen Abeler who has been a true friend to the autism community. We are extremely grateful to his guidance and support throughout the years.

Thanks much for the opportunity to testify today about this autism bill.

I support this DHS legislation, however it does not go far enough and DHS still has many hurdles and obstacles that prevent children getting access to services and treatments.

As you may know, there are over 17 thousand with autism in Minnesota, yet less than 200 hundred board certified behavior analysts. This means getting access is already restricted by the shortage of qualified therapist and workforce.

Nevertheless, DHS has put additional obstacles for children and families to get access to already limited autism treatment. For example, DHS is asking providers to write which level therapist will do the intervention or what level education they have such as a bachelors or a masters. As I parent, I think this is simply out of touch with reality and ludicrous for several reasons. First autism parents are only interested if the treating provider is qualified, second – it is extremely difficult to know six months ahead which is what DHS is requiring what degree a particular therapist would have, and third – autism children's needs are very fluid meaning even if a provider assigned a bachelor's level – the child may display problem behavior that may require someone with a master's.

Another unnecessary obstacle from DHS is they are limiting the amount of hours a child with autism gets training and observation daily to two hours per day per therapist. This is very difficult for families whose children are older such as my son who is now 14 years old. For example, the therapist providing training and observing a four-year-old child with autism in their natural community and he has behaviors, then perhaps two hours may be enough because one can just pick up the four-year-old. On the other hand, if the direction and observation is for a 15-year-old or a 20-year-old – picking up and removing this autistic individual is not so easy and this may and does take more than two hours. In such case as it happened to my son – does the therapist tell the family (too bad, so sad my time is up and I have to leave you in the middle of your child having a behavior in the grocery store). I find this policy cruel and wrong not to mention out of touch with reality. The amount of hours and intensity needed should depend on the need of the child not DHS or any bureaucrat.

This benefit as many of you remember and voted for in 2013 is supposed to help individuals with autism up age 21. I think DHS is failing our older children and I humbly ask you to please amend this legislation and take out these requirements. I also ask you to assure DHS is seeking and engaging with families as they currently do not. Please know that toddlers with autism become teenagers with autism and adults with autism, thus - there cannot be one size fits all intervention, it must be individualized. Older children have different needs that will take longer time to address.

Once again, thanks very much for your time and consideration!

Idil