



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
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March 18, 2024

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

House Bill 2712 HD1 – Relating to Autism

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2712 HD1 – Relating to Autism.

This bill would appropriate funds to increase the funding for applied behavioral analysis services for persons with autism. Requires the Department of Human Services to obtain maximum federal matching funds and pursue all other funding sources.

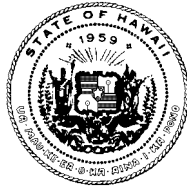
These services have a positive long term impact on individuals with autism, but the failure to increase the reimbursement rate for almost a decade has made it difficult for Med-QUEST beneficiaries to obtain such services.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

March 16, 2024

To: The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: [HB 2712 HD1](#) – RELATING TO AUTISM.

Hearing: March 18, 2024, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225, State Capitol & Video Conference

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this bill as long as the appropriations do not reduce or replace the priorities identified in the Executive Supplemental Budget Request for FY2025.

PURPOSE: This bill appropriates funds to increase the funding for applied behavioral analysis (ABA) services for persons with autism. Requires the Department of Human Services to obtain maximum federal matching funds and pursue all other funding sources. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The House Committee on Human Services (HD1) amended this measure by changing its effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion.

DHS appreciates the intent of this bill to increase the rates for ABA services. ABA services are a clinically effective treatment modality for many children diagnosed with autism. The Med-QUEST Division commissioned a [rate study](#) for ABA services, which was submitted to the Legislature in December 2023. That rate study modeled low, medium, and high scenarios for consideration. The low scenario would require \$6.5M (\$2.69M state funds/\$3.81M federal),

March 16, 2024

Page 2

the medium scenario would require \$7.8M (\$3.23M state funds/\$4.57M federal), and the high scenario would require \$9.4M (\$3.9M state funds/\$5.5M federal).

To reiterate, DHS only supports an appropriation if it does not reduce or replace the priorities identified in the Executive Supplemental Budget Request for FY2025. Also, DHS prefers that any appropriation be included in the executive budget bill as a recurring expense as opposed to a bill so the appropriation could be recurring and the increase ongoing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



WE LOVE WHAT WE DO

Committee on Health and Human Services
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Monday, March 18, 2024
1:00 pm
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 225
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

SUPPORT HB2712 HD1 RELATING TO AUTISM

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of HB2712 HD1**. BAYADA is a not-for-profit health care company committed to serving our community. We provide services across the state, with behavioral health services for QUEST members on Oahu and Maui.

As a behavioral health service provider, we have struggled to meet the needs of children with autism on Med-QUEST due to the increased costs of operating a business without increased rates for our services. QUEST rates for the coverage of intensive behavioral therapy (IBT) for treatment of children under 21 years of age with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), also referred to as applied behavior analysis (ABA), were set in 2015 and have not increased, despite the increased costs of living and increased costs for employers over the last 8 years. Wages have gone up nearly 30% since 2015 in Hawai'i, forcing businesses to shoulder the cost without proportionate rate increases, making it harder to attract candidates and businesses to the field of supporting individuals with autism and their families.

We appreciate the efforts taken in 2023 to pass the resolution and complete a rate study of ABA QUEST rates. During the rate study process, we participated in stakeholder meetings and completed the provider survey. Our experience in these meetings and the subsequent results of the rate study echoed our experience as an ABA provider in the state—**our rates do not allow us to serve the children with autism and their families who need us**. As an organization, our values are compassion, excellence, and reliability; however, due to difficulties in attracting and retaining staff we find ourselves troubled that we cannot consistently deliver these values to our clients. We're receiving more applications than ever, and offering more conditional offers, however we're seeing lower position acceptance or transition to hired.



WE LOVE WHAT WE DO

We have experienced increases in turnover due to staff needing to find higher paying jobs, often shifting to tourism instead of healthcare, to support themselves and their families. We also see more and more staff who want to continue being an ABA provider choose to leave the state where they can make more and have a lower cost of living.

Currently, **we must maintain a waitlist for clients to access services because there is more demand than we are able to meet with our current providers.** At our Oahu location, 40% of those on our waitlist are QUEST members. At our Maui location, 66% are QUEST members. We closed our Big Island and Kauai insurance-based services, despite ongoing community need, due to losses based on unsustainable rates in 2018. These waitlists are only representative of our organization and are similar across providers.

We respectfully request the Committee pass this bill in support of increasing rates for what we believe are under-covered behavioral health services.

Mahalo,

Maile Martin
BAYADA Behavioral Health

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 12:57:21 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christina Libby	Testifying for Mau Loa Learning	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a providing organization and a parent in Hawaii, I wholeheartedly support the increase in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) rates through bill HB2712 for QUEST (Medicaid) services. ABA therapy is a crucial intervention for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, providing them with essential skills to lead fulfilling lives. However, current rates often fail to adequately compensate providers, leading to limited access to quality care and placing financial strain on families.

By increasing ABA rates, we can ensure that providers are fairly compensated for their expertise and dedication, thereby expanding access to this vital therapy for individuals with autism across Hawaii. This not only benefits those directly receiving ABA services but also contributes to the overall well-being of our communities by fostering greater inclusion and support for individuals with developmental disabilities.

As a parent, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of ABA therapy on development and quality of life. It is imperative that we prioritize equitable reimbursement rates to sustain and enhance the availability of these services for families like mine. I urge policymakers to support bill HB2712 and take proactive steps towards ensuring that all individuals with autism have access to the care they need to thrive.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Christina Libby, M.S., BCBA, LBA

CEO & founder, Mau Loa Learning

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/12/2024 9:52:17 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support.

Written Testimony

Committee on Human Services

Monday, March 18, 2024 / 1:00 pm
Conference Room 225, Hawai'i State Capitol

By

Christine K. Walton, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA
President, Behavior Analysis No Ka Oi, Inc.

HB2712– REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES' MED-QUEST DIVISION TO TAKE STEPS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT PROVIDER RATES ARE INCREASED FOR APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS SERVICES.

Chair Senator San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of** HB2712, which appropriates funding for the Med-Quest division for non-covered or under-covered behavioral health services for Med-Quest beneficiaries.

I am the President of Behavior Analysis No Ka Oi, Inc., a Kaka'ako-based clinic serving people with autism for over 15 years. At our clinic, we provide applied behavior analysis (ABA), a medically necessary, empirically validated treatment approach for children diagnosed with autism and other related disorders. Since the passing of Luke's Law in 2015, which requires health insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism, there has been no change to the Medicaid fee schedule for ABA.

The operational costs of running a clinic have increased significantly since 2015. Specifically, costs related to rent, health insurance for employees, other employee benefits, and the IRS standard mileage reimbursement rate for employees who commute to the families' homes or other community sites have all increased.

As a direct result of no increases to the Medicaid fee schedule for ABA, we have been struggling with hiring. Interviewees request competitive wages, comparable to school-based services, which reimburse at a higher rate. We struggle not only with recruiting the best providers but also with retaining our most qualified providers, where several have relocated to the mainland, where the cost of living is lower, and fee schedules are higher. We are simply unable to serve clients due to the challenges of recruiting and retaining providers, resulting in a current wait

list for services of approximately 3 years. While the passage of Luke's Law was a monumental advancement in securing services for the people of Hawai'i, it is not impactful if those it was meant to ensure services for cannot find providers.

In conclusion, in order to provide medically necessary services, funding for the Med-Quest division for non-covered or under-covered behavioral health services for Med-Quest beneficiaries must be increased.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2024 12:25:00 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Faith Kahakelii	Testifying for Behavior Analysis No Ka Oi	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a clinician in the field, I have seen the difficulty in and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA. I love the work I do, but it's difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA. Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

I strongly support rate increases for ABA, as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) who has been closely involved in the field for over 10 years, I can attest to the critical importance of adequately compensating ABA professionals for their expertise and dedication to improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities.

ABA therapy is widely recognized as one of the most effective interventions for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities. Its evidence-based practices have consistently demonstrated significant positive outcomes in improving communication, social skills, behavior management, and overall quality of life for those receiving services.

However, providing high-quality ABA therapy requires a considerable investment of time, resources, and expertise. RBT professionals undergo extensive education and training to acquire the necessary skills to implement individualized treatment plans tailored to the unique needs of each client. Additionally, ongoing professional development and supervision are essential to ensuring the effectiveness and integrity of ABA interventions.

Despite the invaluable contributions of ABA professionals, the current reimbursement rates often fail to reflect the true cost of delivering quality services. Inadequate compensation not only undermines the sustainability of ABA programs but also jeopardizes the ability of providers to attract and retain qualified professionals, ultimately compromising the quality of care provided to individuals and families in need.

A rate increase for ABA services is not only warranted but also imperative to address the growing demand for quality care and to support the continued growth and development of the ABA workforce. By adequately compensating ABA professionals, we can ensure the availability of high-quality services that empower individuals with developmental disabilities to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

I urge you to carefully consider the significant impact that a rate increase would have on the accessibility and quality of ABA services within our community. Your support in advocating for fair and equitable reimbursement rates is crucial in advancing the field of ABA and promoting the well-being of individuals with developmental disabilities.



March 13, 2024

RE: HB 2712 – Relating to Autism

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Joy A. Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Senators Jarrett Keohokaloe, Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, and Brenton Awa, Committee Members

Dear Committee Chair Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members,

I am submitting this letter in **support of HB 2712 – Relating to Autism**, on behalf of Easterseals Hawaii and the families we serve. Easterseals Hawaii provided services including applied behavior analysis (ABA) to over 1,700 persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) statewide in 2023. Our purpose is to create a more equitable world where people with I/DD can choose their own path.

ABA is empirically validated, enables persons with I/DD to acquire essential daily living skills, and is thus considered to be the “gold standard” intervention for many individuals with I/DD and autism. As reflected in HB 2712’s statements, wage pressures are a significant barrier to effectively providing ABA services to everyone who needs them. Like many other ABA providers, Easterseals Hawaii has struggled to recruit and maintain essential staff for our programs because of these wage and cost pressures. Increasing med-QUEST ABA rates will alleviate pressure on programs like ours and enable us to more effectively serve the community so that Hawaiians with I/DD can acquire skills that enable them to live their best lives.

Easterseals Hawaii strongly urges you to vote in support of HB 2712.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "apettiford".

Andrea Pettiford
Chief Executive Officer
Easterseals Hawaii

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Liebert Lewis".

Rachel Liebert Lewis
Legislative Researcher and Policy Architect
Easterseals Hawaii

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 4:49:59 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amy D. Wiech	Testifying for ABC Group Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

14 March, 2024

My name is Dr. Amy Smith Wiech, I am a Board Certified Behavior Analyst at the Doctoral Level and I have been an ABA practitioner for over 30 years. I founded ABC Group in 2006, and we have been providing life-changing Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) treatment to the children and families of Oahu for nearly the last 20 years. Approximately 50% of our clientele are MedQuest/Medicaid patients, with even more on our over 1 year long waitlist!

High quality, medically-necessary ABA treatment ameliorates the symptoms of autism by teaching toleration skills for difficult routines or tasks, teaching communication skills to replace maladaptive behavior, teaching pre-employment skills and life (such as social skills, conversational skills, following directions and written task completion skills) so that

children/adolescents can be employable by the time they reach age 18 or 21, and as independent as possible.

Amelioration of these symptoms can also push a kid back into general education classrooms to participate with their typically developing peers.

They can have sleepovers and best friends, join Boy Scouts, and get jobs to support themselves!

20 years ago, in 2004, I started working with TRICARE as a sole BCBA provider here on Oahu to provide ABA treatment to military dependents. The rates 20 years ago for BCBA were \$37.50 (15 minutes), or \$125 an hour. The rates for “tutor” were \$12.50 (15 minutes) or \$50/hour (the term “tutor” would become what we know as an RBT when the BACB adopted this level of practitioner and created the first credential for RBTs in 2015).

In 2015, when MedQuest announced the rates for ABA treatment, MedQuest and commercial payers adopted these same publicly available published rates that were borrowed from the 2002-

2004 TRICARE rates.

These ABA rates in Hawaii that were set on the 2002-2004 TRICARE rates, have remained nearly the same for the last 20 years, despite the cost of living in Hawaii skyrocketing over 68% in that same time. Additionally, Medical care inflation per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has increased 2% to 4% per year since 2004 for a cumulative increase of 88% over the last 20 years. These current rates do not leave us much left with to pay our overhead expenses at our clinic, provide staff pay increases to keep up with inflation, or much of a profit. Our electric bill was just provided to us by our landlord and it is over \$7000 for last month alone!

Unique to the medical field, ABA providers are also burdened with the cost of training the candidates to become RBTs, training them on the job, whether an easy kid or a really challenging kid. There is no Remington College or Heald College for RBTs.

When BCBA's or RBTs come to us asking for a raise, it is heartbreaking to hear that they cannot afford gas, or food for their families, so they need to go look for other work. Hence the reason for high

turnover in ABA, another variable adding to the costs that we endure. The cost to an organization for losing an RBT is \$5000-7000 per RBT who leaves. This mirrors the attrition of BCBA's who cost an organization \$10,000-\$15,000 (or about 10-15% of their salary).

Burnout is real folks. Staff are leaving the industry of ABA because this is DIFFICULT work. Our reimbursement rates have not increased substantially in the last 20 years and the lack of meaningful increases in reimbursement rates leaves the industry unable to adequately compensate these dedicated, hardworking individuals!

How many of you could go without a pay raise for 20 years? At ABC Group, we are hitting a cost ceiling. Our net margins are abysmal. We are at a critical juncture.

Over the last 20 years we have been providing 1st Class Seats (or even seats in our Private Jet!) for the Economy Fares that MedQuest reimburses, and unfortunately we will be forced to change

our high quality care model if you do not pass these rate increases!

This will force us to:

1. Discontinue paying our staff for quality-related

non-billable time that allows us to make

treatment more efficient, and more effective,

therefore allowing for titration faster. It will just

take us longer to get to the titration finish line. This will cost MedQuest and the State more money in the long run.

2. Discontinue intake of the most challenging

patients that no other providers will intake, since

intaking a severe kid requires the allocation of

staff resources (much of those that are non-

billable). It requires the allocation of RBTs who

can “handle” those crisis behaviors when they

arise, and is also a variable for staff burnout.

When they are in crisis it costs us more money

to staff that patient especially when they present

with severe physical and severe behavioral

challenges. These are your patients who

unfortunately are on a future path to residential

treatment which will cost the State of Hawaii upwards of \$350k per year per individual. This will cost MedQuest and the State more money in the long run.

3. Discontinue the intake of those challenging patients who cannot tolerate routine medical exams or treatment, dental treatment, or have self-imposed dietary limitations that impact their daily health. The costs of mitigating these health challenges may be priceless to families. This will cost MedQuest and the State more money in the long run.

4. Discontinuing the items above will create a network adequacy issue for MedQuest as no other providers will take these patients now, and we already know there is a delay with waitlists where EPSDT requires services be provided without delay. Sadly this would force providers like us to just only take the easy patients. This will cost MedQuest and the State more money in the long run.

The cost of doing business in Hawaii is the highest in all of the United States. Taxes, insurance,

workers comp, mandated health insurance coverage, and costs of commercial real estate skyrocketing are forcing us to reexamine our business model unless we are able to persuade you to vote in support of this bill HB 2712.

This is make it or break it for us as ABA provider, the children we serve and the families across our state.

Please pass this bill. It is critical.

Sincerely,

Amy Wiech, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA

Board Certified Since 2004

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 5:21:01 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenyce Tolentino	Testifying for ABC GROUP HAWAII	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

WHY I SUPPORT!

As an RBT, I love the work I do, but it's difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA.

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need.

Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 11:02:47 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
BTSH	Testifying for BTSH	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a provider and a representative of a provider agency, I am in support of HB2712. With the cost of living already too high (increasing), inflation, and the decreased employee pool, it has become very difficult to staff qualified providers to support children with special needs (autism in particular for this purpose) through ABA. Due to the reimbursement rates staying low, medicaid has set a precedence to pay providers a lower rate than providers can achieve working in other industries. Providers in this industry have resorted to hiring staff that are not dedicated to staying in Hawaii and are not dedicated to making this industry a career move rather than a temporary job. I urge the representatives and law makers of Hawaii to improve our industry standards and improving the quality of services by improving the quality of employment for ABA. Help keep dedicated ABA providers here in Hawaii and help service the children of Hawaii. Mahalo.

Hawaii Senate
Committee on Health and Human Services
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

March 15, 2024

RE: In Support of HB2712 *Submitted online via the Hawaii State Legislature website*

Esteemed Chair San Buenaventura Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

I write you today on behalf of The Council of Autism Service Providers (CASP) in support of HB 2712. CASP is a non-profit trade association of autism service provider organizations that have a demonstrated committed to promoting and delivering evidence-based practices for individuals with autism. CASP represents the autism provider community to the nation at large, including government, payers, and the general public. CASP provides information, education, and promotes the generally accepted standards of care for applied behavior analysis, ABA.

Of particular interest to our members is the coverage of evidence-based care in both private health insurance plans as well as through Medicaid. Timely access to medically necessary treatment, including applied behavior analysis, is critical for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).¹

The State of Hawaii took an important step in 2015, when it passed legislation requiring coverage of medically necessary care for ASD. Since then, individuals diagnosed with ASD have had access to meaningful interventions, reducing their need for special education services, improving their quality of life, and opening doors for further education and employment.

This coverage includes children under the age of 21 who are enrolled in MedQUEST, assuring access to medically necessary care pursuant to Medicaid's Early Periodic, Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) mandate and CMS' Informational Bulletin on Clarification of

¹ The American Academy of Pediatrics has long recognized that immediate intervention is critical in the treatment of autism. Pediatrics, Vol. 120, No.5, Management of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2007), p. 1163.
46_dmhc_regs.pdf

Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism.² EPSDT requires that these services be provided **without delay**. The previously referenced CMS bulletin states:

*EPSDT also requires medically necessary diagnostic and treatment services. When a screening examination indicates the need for further evaluation of a child's health, the child should be appropriately referred for diagnosis and treatment **without delay**. Ultimately, the goal of EPSDT is to assure that children get the health care they need, when they need it – the right care to the right child at the right time in the right setting.*

The role of states is to make sure all covered services are available as well as to assure that families of enrolled children, including children with ASD, are aware of and have access to a broad range of services to meet the individual child's needs.

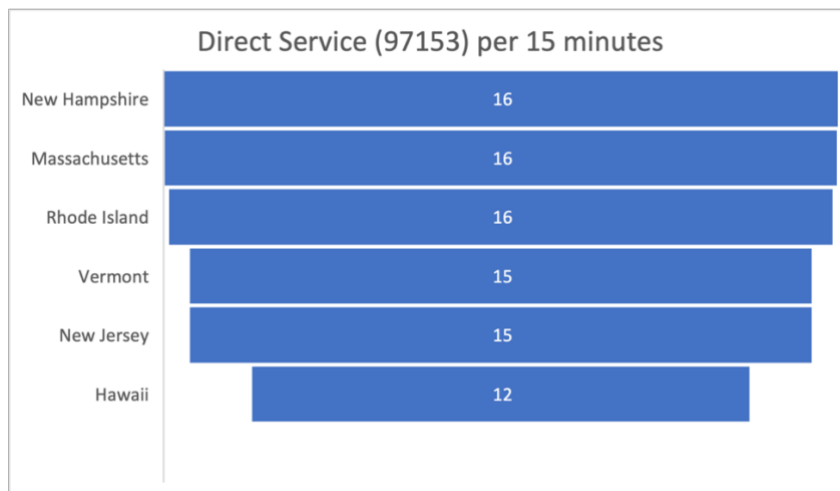
Ensuring an adequate network is established by offering appropriate rates is critical. The existing MedQUEST rates have not been adjusted since 2015, even though the cost of providing these services has skyrocketed. This has caused our member organizations to maintain wait lists for children who are in dire need of services and is in direct contradiction to the requirements of EPSDT.

Additionally, as indicated below, other states with similar costs of living have rates that are more in line with economic forces and many of these states also allow for concurrent billing of CPT codes 97153 and 97155, consistent with guidance from the American Medical Association CPT codebook³ and the ABA Coding Coalition.⁴

² Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services. Informational Bulletin, Clarification of Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism, July 7, 2014 (hereinafter "CMS Informational Bulletin"), available at <http://www.medicaid.gov/Federal-Policy-Guidance/Downloads/CIB-07-07-14.pdf>.

³ AMA Current Procedural Terminology, CPT 2022 Professional Edition, pg. 815 "97155: Adaptive behavioral treatment with protocol modification, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional, which may include simultaneous direction of technician, face to face with one patient, each 15 minutes."

⁴ www.abacodes.org



According to the most recent estimates from the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in every 36 children⁵ is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. This means that more than 2% of Hawaii's children who are on Medicaid have an autism spectrum disorder and to date, many are unable to access the most basic, evidence-based treatments for their diagnosis.

On behalf of CASP and our member organizations serving individuals with autism in Hawaii, we ask that you pass HB2712, which appropriates funds for increased reimbursement rates for ABA service providers. Thank you for your work in the past and moving forward to ensure that all MedQUEST beneficiaries, including children with autism, have access to life-changing, evidence-based care.

Respectfully,



Mariel C. Fernandez, M.S., BCBA, LBA (TX)
Vice President of Government Affairs
The Council of Autism Service Providers
mfernandez@casproviders.org
334-332-2504

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/addm-community-report/executive-summary.html>



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
1010 Richards Street Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: 586-8126 Fax: 586-8129
email: spin@doh.hawaii.gov

March 18, 2024

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

Ms. Martha Guinan, *Chair*
Ms. Susan Wood, *Vice Chair*

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Ms. Mary Brogan
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the Superintendent*
Ms. Wendy Nakasone-Kalani,
*liaison to the military
community*

Amanda Kaahanui, Staff
Susan Rocco, Staff

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Committee on Health & Human Services
Hawaii Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: HB 2712, HD 1 - RELATING TO AUTISM

Dear Senator Buenaventura and members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, **supports** HB 2712, HD 1 which increases funding for applied behavior analysis (ABA) services for individuals with autism who are eligible through Med-QUEST.

SEAC supported the passage of Act 199 which mandated insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism, as well as legislation setting up the licensure of behavior analysts to provide quality services with fidelity. Applied behavioral analysis has long been acknowledged as one of the most effective evidence-based interventions for ameliorating the social, behavioral, and communication challenges of children and youth with autism and other significant developmental disabilities. For many of these students, early access to ABA services can reduce the need for more intensive and costly special education services in subsequent years and lead to more productive lives.

While Med-QUEST now covers medically necessary ABA services for children on the spectrum, its reimbursement rate to providers has remained stagnant for almost a decade, causing some providers to opt not to take on new autism patients with Med-QUEST coverage and other providers to leave the field. Some children are waitlisted for a year or longer to receive these critically necessary supports. SEAC believes this legislation will build provider capacity and lead to positive outcomes for children and youth with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan
Chair

*Mandated by the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act***



Committee on Health and Human Services
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Monday, March 18, 2024
1:00 pm
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 225
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

SUPPORT HB2712 HD1 RELATING TO AUTISM

Honorable Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Hawai'i Association for Behavior Analysis (HABA) we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of HB2712 HD1 which appropriates funds to increase the funding for applied behavior analysis services for persons with autism** and requires the Department of Human Services to obtain maximum federal matching funds and pursue all other funding sources.

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) is a medically necessary service provided for QUEST beneficiaries under the age of 21 with an autism diagnosis for intensive behavioral therapy (IBT), as mandated by section 1905(r) of the Social Security Act for Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT). Autism is classified as a mental health condition, included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) and ABA treatment is the leading behavioral health treatment to ameliorate symptoms associated with this diagnosis and focuses on improving independence and decreasing the level of supports and services needed over the lifetime.

The state took great strides in the last legislative session to bring Medicaid payments to 100% of Medicare. Unfortunately for ABA providers, this did not include our services because the American Medical Association (AMA) Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) codes for ABA services are carrier priced, meaning the [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\) Medicare Physician Fee Schedule \(MPFS\)](#) do not currently set rates for our services. This has resulted in a lack of parity for these intensive behavioral health services in our state.

We thank the legislature for passing the concurrent resolution in 2023 which required the rate study for QUEST ABA rates. As noted in the final report ([DC233](#)), providers across the state have reported that recruiting and retaining a workforce has becoming increasingly difficult. Reimbursement rates for QUEST services were set in 2015 and have not increased, creating a hardship for behavioral health providers. This has resulted in significant delays for beneficiaries to access services, as well as not being able to meet the full service needs for children and families in our state. Additionally, some providers

have reported not accepting QUEST or not taking on any new QUEST patients due to the below market reimbursement rates.

QUEST beneficiaries are too often faced with a lack of access to services across the state, especially on neighbor islands. Providers willing to accept QUEST report having to maintain waitlists, with families sometimes waiting for years to access their medically necessary behavioral health treatment. Research demonstrates that early intensive intervention and provision of services in line with the [professional standards of care](#) for treatment dosage produce the best gains for individuals and can decrease the costs of care over the lifetime. **Investing in access to services when children are young decreases costs needed to support individuals across the lifespan.**

Due to low reimbursement rates and the high cost of living here in the islands, there is a shortage of providers, creating provider network adequacy issues. An increase in reimbursement rates would allow providers to pay livable wages and create additional stable jobs to serve QUEST beneficiaries.

We urge you to pass this bill to address the urgent need for increased rates for applied behavior analysis services for the Medicaid population. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Mahalo,



Kristen Koba-Burd, BCBA, LBA, CDP
Legislative Chair
Hawai'i Association for Behavior Analysis
Legislation@hawaiiaba.org



Aloha e Committee Chair- Senator San Buenaventura, Vice Chair- Senator Aquino, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Maui Learning Academy, a private school specializing in medical necessity and academic-based behavior-analytic services, we would like to offer testimony in **strong support of HB 2712**, relating to the appropriation of funds to increase funding for applied behavior analysis (ABA) services for individuals with autism.

I am writing to express my strong support for proposed legislation aimed at adjusting rates for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services. Since the inception of coverage in 2015, the rates for these essential services have remained stagnant, failing to keep pace with the rising costs of living. As a result, children with autism in our state are not receiving the level of care they

Please prioritize this legislation and take decisive action to ensure that rates for ABA services are adjusted to reflect the current economic realities. By doing so, we can uphold our commitment to supporting children with autism and their families, providing them with the resources and support they need to thrive. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Suzanne Ely'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Suzanne Ely
Head of School



Date: March 15th, 2024

To: Committee on Health and Human Services
Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Sen. Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

From: Hawai`i Early Intervention Coordinating Council (HEICC)

Re: Support for **HB 2712**, Relating to Autism

The Early Intervention Section is advised by the Hawaii Early Intervention Coordinating Council (HEICC). The HEICC is established as required by state law ([Hawaii Revised Statutes §321-353](#)) and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

HEICC strongly supports passage of HB 2712, which appropriates funds to increase the funding for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services for persons with autism.

Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to continue to recruit and retain staff and to meet our federal mandate of supporting all keiki with special needs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony **in support of HB 2712**.

Kerrie A. Urosevich
Chair

TO: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Robert G. Peters, Chair
Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: Measure: HB 2712, HD 1 – RELATING TO AUTISM
Date: Monday, March 18, 2024
Time: 1:00 PM
Place: Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Early Learning Board Position: Support

The Early Learning Board (ELB) is the governing board for the Executive Office on Early Learning. ELB supports HB 2712, HD 1 which appropriates funds to increase the funding for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services to persons with autism.

Rates for ABA services have remained the same since 2015, despite the growing cost of living in Hawaii. In order to recruit and retain ABA service providers, rate increases are essential. Ensuring access to qualified providers will allow the State to satisfy the federal mandate to support all children with special needs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2712, HD 1.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 8:47:30 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Crystal Thomas	Testifying for Horizons Academy of Maui	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a provider of ABA services, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA. By increasing rates, we can support and retain our current staff and recruit new staff into the field. Our direct service providers need to be paid an adequate wage and rates would help providers remain competitive with providers who do not serve QUEST customers. Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state. Children with autism are waitlisted daily and are unable to access the services they need due to providers' difficulty hiring and retaining staff. Please support efforts to increase QUEST rates for ABA.

**The Senate, Ka ‘Aha Kenekoa
The Thirty-Second Legislature
Regular Session Of 2024**

**Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Committee on Health and Human Services**

Lauren Rapoport
Resident of Kailua, Hawaii

Written Testimony for the Hearing on March 18, 2024 at 1:00PM
State Capitol Conference Room 225
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Testimony in Support of HB 2712 HD1 [Relating To Autism]

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Lauren Rapoport and I strongly support the passage of HB 2712 HD1. I am a Masters in Social Work student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and a resident of Kailua. Through my masters, I have interned at an interdisciplinary program focused on disability, in which I have been able to gain the insights of professionals in many fields; My conversations with many of Oahu’s developmental pediatricians, general pediatricians, BCBA’s, PhD’s, psychologists, social workers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, public health students, special education teachers, and self advocates have led me to understand the importance of this bill. From these conversations, it is clear to me that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) on Med-QUEST plans are often forced to wait years for access to ABA services. Many agencies are unable to provide services for Med-QUEST patients; The reimbursement rates are so low that businesses would not be able to afford to stay afloat and employees would not be able to afford to pay their living costs if they accepted many Med-QUEST patients. Agencies that do accept Med-QUEST patients often only accept a small, specified number of Med-QUEST patients. As a result, children on Med-QUEST plans are forced to wait much longer for ABA services than children with private health insurance, widening the health equity gap that already exists among low socioeconomic status families in Hawaii.

Additionally, the low rate of Med-QUEST reimbursement for ABA services in Hawaii has contributed to the lack of ABA providers in Hawaii; RBT's outside of the DOE are not paid a liveable wage and as a result leave ABA work to pursue other professions and/or move to other states for higher wages. Raising the Med-QUEST reimbursement rate for ABA services may improve the job retention of ABA professionals, and may encourage local residents to pursue training and work in the ABA field. In addition, passage of this bill will likely shorten waiting times for and improve access to ABA services for low socioeconomic status families who have a child, adolescent, or young adult with autism spectrum disorder. While 2015 Luke's Law was designed to create equitable access to services for minors with ASD, children and adults with ASD continue to face barriers to care in Hawaii; I believe HB 2712 HD1 would begin to diminish some of these barriers. I urge you to support HB 2712 HD1. Thank you for your time and consideration of my written testimony, and I look forward to testifying in person.

Respectfully,

Lauren Rapoport

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 4:38:06 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Josliene Miller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need. Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 7:06:49 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Letesha Driskell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a provider, it is difficult to maintain competent direct service providers because the rates are too low for them to maintain a reasonable standard of living. This affects our students/clients because they do not receive the medically necessary services.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 6:55:16 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheyenne F Chavez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA. As an RBT, I love the work I do, but it's difficult with the cost of living. Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state. I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 7:29:11 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sara Sato	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, My name is Sara Sato and I was born and raised in Hawai'i. I have worked with individuals with disabilities in a variety of capacities since 1999 and have worked in the DOE, home, community, and clinic environments. I currently serve as the Clinical Director of an ABA agency in Honolulu, Hawai'i that employs approximately 30 staff. There are many reasons why a rate increase is so important to us.

First, as the minimum wage rates have risen and many other jobs out there are also raising their starting rates, we need to receive reimbursement at a rate that would allow us to attract top talent. The job of a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) is TOUGH. RBTs are implementing procedures day in and day out with learners who can engage in severe challenging behaviors such as head banging, aggression, Pica, self-injury, and elopement. Our RBTs are put through intensive training, required to implement procedures with fidelity, and ensure the safety and dignity of their learners while also ensuring their well-being. Our staff are dedicated, want to make a difference, and are so passionate about the success of our learners, but as I mentioned above, it is HARD work. From an objective stance, I can understand wanting to seek better pay in a job that requires less of you, to make ends meet. However, we want to retain staff who are passionate, want to put in the hard work, and truly make a difference.

To provide quality care, we need to be reimbursed at an acceptable rate. To provide quality care, there is a lot that goes on behind the scenes. Some tasks need to be completed when the client isn't present. For example, creating materials that will make it easier for the learner to understand. We need to meet as teams to discuss client progress, what can be better, and how to ensure consistency across team members. If additional training is needed that can't solely be accomplished in session with the learner, we are committed to paying for that time so that our staff are well trained and feel supported. These are just a few examples of where the reimbursement rate alone, doesn't cover it.

Finally, there is an overall shortage of ABA providers in the state. There are waitlists across agencies to provide services. We need to attract more people to the field so we can meet the needs of individuals with autism and their families. If the rates are not increased I am afraid that those providing ABA services in Hawai'i will decrease and this in turn will create an even bigger issue of more individuals and their families NOT receiving care at a critical point. This will put further strain on the state to provide care for an aging population. Please allocate funding to this worthy cause. Please help us provide the best quality care possible so we can truly make a difference.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 8:34:11 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Bastardo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a RBT, I love work that I do but it's difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA. Rates for ABA service have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased cost of living.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 9:00:15 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Renee K Szameitat	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a parent of an autistic child who receives ABA services. I've seen the difference it makes in their life and I support this bill so that more children in our state can access ABA therapy. It is so important in an autistic child's life and there are so many children in need of this service who are on a long wait list of 2-4 years out.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 9:34:45 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amy Gerard	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greetings,

I am a parent of two children who receives ABA. I've seen the difference it makes in their lives and I support this bill so that more children in our state can access ABA.

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need. As we see, the prevalence of children with the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis is increasing, and the need is great.

Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to compensate the organizations providing the care, in turn, ability to recruit and retain the staff needed to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard,

Amy Gerard

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 9:44:59 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaitlin Preciado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a dedicated Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and an advocate deeply involved in the practice of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), I lend my full support to the legislative proposal aimed at enhancing QUEST rates for ABA services. My support is based on thorough observations of the positive outcomes ABA therapy offers children with autism and the difficulties faced by their families and the Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs) who provide this essential care. The necessity for this bill is clear: to overcome the significant barriers in the recruitment and retention of proficient ABA professionals and to ensure they are compensated equitably, thereby increasing the reach of indispensable services to a greater number of children with autism.

The rates for ABA services, unchanged since 2015, have severely restricted our ability to offer the highest quality of care and to fairly compensate our committed professionals, including both RBTs and fellow BCBA's. The continual rise in the cost of living magnifies these challenges, threatening our resolve to uphold the exceptional standard of care required.

In my professional capacity, I have been privileged to witness the extraordinary effects of ABA on children and the profound sense of relief and optimism it brings to their families. Accessibility to these services is critical. Enhancing the rates would widen the scope for numerous families to benefit from ABA, thus providing countless children with the essential support necessary for a brighter and more hopeful future.

Backing this bill is more than a fiscal endorsement; it is a testament to our dedication to the developmental needs of our children and an acknowledgment of the tireless dedication of our professionals. Advancing this bill is a key step towards diminishing waitlists and guaranteeing timely access to ABA services, which will substantially benefit children with autism and their families.

I appeal to you to support the initiative to increase QUEST rates for ABA services, which will help forge a more inclusive and caring environment for children with autism and celebrate the commendable work of ABA professionals.

Your support for this critical initiative is indispensable, and I look forward to discussing how we can collaborate to make a significant, positive difference. Thank you for considering this crucial proposal.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 10:08:19 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Allison Schurtz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have been a provider in the field of autism for near 20 years and in the state of Hawaii for over 10 years. Other payors have increased their rates to ensure people who service this population are able to support themselves to continue to support Hawaii's children with autism, while QUEST rates remain the same since 2015? How are families supposed to fairly access their services and be taken off waitlists when rates are so low it is forcing professionals to pivot to providing services within other capacities just to support themselves? Here at our clinic we have multiple RBT's who are working in other services lines when they would prefer to be providing services to Insurance-Based families; however, with the pay rate being so drastically different they are unable to pay their bills if they do. QUEST rates HAVE to increase for ABA to continue to serve Hawaii's children with autism in the quality way they deserve.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 10:08:38 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristen Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need. Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 10:33:25 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason J Stauffer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 10:54:24 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Gonzales	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a parent of a child with Severe Autism and receives ABA. I've seen the difference it makes in their life and I support this bill so that more children in our state can access ABA. My child has learned some independence and continues on with the help of his RBT's and BCBA. They as a team has worked with him so hard to get to the point where he's at. With their help they have taught me as well. Please support ABA for a child's better and successful future.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 12:20:35 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joe Dalessandro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

as a parent of a child with autism we have seen how ABA has helped him lead a more calm and inclusive life with his family and community. By increasing the funding for this service more autistic children and adults will benefit.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 12:35:29 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maria Angela Caslib	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a parent of a child who receives ABA. I've seen the difference in his life because of so many improvements developmentally in all aspects. My son who was non-verbal can now talk and able to convey his needs. My son is now on his way to independence to do ADLs. He can now do toileting by himself. Unacceptable behaviors like hitting, are now resolved through the help of ABA. I choose to maintain my child for ABA because I know that this is no doubt helping my child and myself to thrive & succeed in life despite the disability. ABA taught me how to take care and attend to my son's needs. As a result, seeing my son's smile at the end of his sessions everyday makes me feel assured that I'm doing the right thing for my son. The BCBA's & RBTs work so hard to assist my family and so I'm grateful for them. I support the rate increase. ABA team deserves it.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 12:46:16 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Noochan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- As a provider, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA.
- I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need.
- Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 2:35:52 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JULIET PABO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- As a provider, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA.
- As an RBT, I love the work I do, but it's difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA.
- I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need.
- Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 4:26:56 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Honesty Rodrigues	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an RBT, I love the work I do, but it's difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 6:11:18 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jari S.K. Sugano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and members of the HHS Committee,

My name is Jari Sugano and I am a parent of a child who receives ABA. I've seen the difference it makes in their life and I support this bill so that more children in our state can access ABA.

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need.

Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

Both my children with autism have benefitted greatly from ABA services in Hawaii.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide strong support for HB2712.

Aloha, Jari Sugano

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 9:18:18 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Akiko Lau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- As a provider, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 7:14:05 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isa Hansen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is one of the most important industries in the world and RBT's subject themselves to some of the most challenging situations that most people aren't willing to partake in.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 3:10:59 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dallas Star	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Our state rates for ABA services has not increased since 2015, as a result our Medicaid population of children and young adults with autism have been denied access to medically necessary care, forced to remain on waitlists during critical years that treatment could make the largest impacts.

Pay for providers has remained stagnant despite increasing inflation and cost of living, stunting the growth of an emerging healthcare field that creates meaningful local jobs for local communities.

Communities in Hawaii will make more back in wages and preventative treatment than we will spend on this bill.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 11:32:29 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Philip Sakaba	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 10:59:20 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Brown	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- As an RBT, I love the work I do, but it's difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 4:15:08 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenifer Olin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I endorse this legislation as ABA services are essential for individuals

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 4:27:50 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kahaleno Kamalani	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Members of the Committee,

Aloha, my name is Kahaleno Kamalani, and I am a proud member of the Native Hawaiian community, as well as an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) service provider. I am writing to express my strong support for HB2712 and its crucial role in ensuring adequate reimbursement for ABA services in Hawaii. This legislation is of utmost importance to our community, and I would like to share insights from both a cultural and professional perspective. As a Native Hawaiian community member, I have witnessed the increasing need for ABA services to support individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) within our community. Hawaii, with its unique geographical isolation, presents challenges that require specific attention when it comes to healthcare services. We must address the pressing issue of lengthy waitlists for ABA services, hindering timely access to crucial interventions for our children. The demand for ABA services is high, and without proper reimbursement rates, we risk leaving many families without the support they desperately need. The geographical isolation of our islands poses an additional challenge in attracting and retaining qualified ABA service providers. It is essential that reimbursement rates are increased to a level that allows providers to afford living and working in Hawaii. By doing so, we not only support the sustainability of existing services but also encourage experienced providers to stay in our state, bringing their expertise to benefit our community. Moreover, the Native Hawaiian culture places significant emphasis on 'ohana' (family) and 'kokua' (help). Adequate reimbursement for ABA services under HB2712 aligns with these cultural values by ensuring that families in need receive the support required to help their children thrive. It is an investment in the well-being of our community and an acknowledgment of the unique challenges we face in our isolated setting. By advocating for increased reimbursement rates, we are not only addressing the immediate needs of those on waitlists but also fostering an environment that attracts skilled professionals. This, in turn, empowers our community to build a sustainable network of ABA services that will benefit generations to come. In conclusion, I respectfully urge you to support HB2712 and its mission to provide adequate reimbursement for ABA services in Hawaii. By doing so, we take a significant step towards ensuring that our Native Hawaiian community has access to the essential services needed for the well-being and growth of our children. Mahalo nui loa for your attention and commitment to the well-being of our community.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 4:37:48 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Koenig	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- As a provider, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 5:53:28 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Johnson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

As a Registered Behavior Technician, I love my job. The increased cost of living makes this career difficult. Though, by supporting this bill and increasing ABA rates, it will be supporting my and my coworkers employment and careers in ABA. Please choose and support this bill, support the Keiki.

Mahalo

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 6:35:46 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Violeta Morales Vazquez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am the parent of the child who receives ABA. I've seen the difference it makes in their life and I support this bill so that more children in our state can access ABA.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 7:44:36 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimberlynn Galapon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a provider, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA. The cost of living in our state as well as the numerous waitlists for services are also other factors that would greatly benefit from increasing the rates to meet and keep up with our and the clients' needs.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2024 7:34:21 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Galit	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2024 9:40:29 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
santo Triolo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a clinical psychologist with a specialty in developmental functioning on Maui. I am also a dad of an autistic adult child who is 27 years old and non-verbal. Providers of ABA services are greatly needed. Their work is very behaviorally oriented to counter nonverbal and verbally challenged individuals. It takes special training to engage in this treatment and their QUEST reimbursement prohibits them from working in this state. My son needs this level of specialty as well as a sign language specialist. Unfortunately, such services have been spotty at best. Some of the best and most talented personnel have left the island or have decided not to be a Quest provider.

By the way, I am one of the few psychologists that takes QUEST patients. Not only are reimbursements well below average, the bureaucracy involved is punitive. For example, I recently had to complete a 50 plus page recredentialing process. I have been licensed in three state over my 39 years of service, in good standing. Anyone can look me up via the board and learn about my credentials (Number: PSY1257). So, why this extra paperwork?

Please vote to increase ABA reimbursements. It can go a long way toward providing care to the developmentally challenged individuals in our state. And along the way, cut out some of the bureaucracy. Mahalo for your consideration and feel free to contact me if you have any questions, 808-268-3833.

Santo Triolo

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2024 4:16:55 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alyssa Ann Aparra	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a provider, I have seen the difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified providers and fully support efforts to increase the QUEST rates for ABA. I support rate increases for ABA so more children with autism can move off of waitlists to access the services they need. Rates for ABA services have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, despite increased costs of living. We need rate increases to meet the needs of children with autism in our state.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2024 9:24:13 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Burdt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a neighbor island resident supporting families with autism, I know the importance of ensuring there is an adequate provider network. A rate increase is desperately needed for these services. Please support this bill so that children can receive the services they need.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2024 9:26:43 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erika Phelps Nishiguchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician, and I diagnose and support children with Autism. I support rate increases for ABA so children and their families don't have to wait as long (up to a year or more!) to get this essential service for their children. Rates have remained the same since coverage started in 2015, making it hard to expand services as cost of living and working in Hawaii has increased.

I have been diagnosing children who were waiting to see me for over two years. It's heartbreaking to finally give them the diagnosis only to tell them one of the most effective interventions has another very long waitlist. I support rate increases so children can receive effective, evidence based ABA services soon after diagnosis.

HB-2712-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2024 9:48:59 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/18/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deborah Ho'ohuli	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in **strong support of HB2712**. As a provider, I bear witness to the persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled personnel, and I wholeheartedly n2 efforts to increase QUEST rates for ABA services. These rate increases are crucial to facilitating the timely provision of essential services to children with autism, enabling them to transition from lengthy waitlists to accessing the vital care they require. Despite the burgeoning costs of living, rates for ABA services have stagnated since their inception in 2015. It is imperative that we implement rate adjustments to adequately address the burgeoning demands of the autism community within our state.

I work as an RBT, and I really love the work that I do, but it's terribly difficult with the cost of living. Please support this bill to increase rates for ABA. I am grateful for your support in this matter.

LATE

HB2712 HD1 Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

Aloha, Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services,

I support increased pay rates and funding for medically-necessary ABA services to begin being provided to individuals who are 21 years old and older through the Medicaid insurance and health plans so that these individuals will also benefit from this measure.

Considerations:

- The annual Social Security Cost of Living pay adjustments to beneficiaries range from 1.3% to 8.7%, well over 23% total since only 2019.
- Individuals who require medically-necessary ABA lose their ABA services under Medicaid upon turning 21 years old. These individuals with an autism diagnosis are discriminated against due to their disability of autism. The federal and state mental health parity laws require these mental health services be covered to the same extent as physical health services.
- Medicaid beneficiaries who need medically-necessary ABA to benefit from the Medicaid I/DD Waiver program and other state services at age 21 and older are currently not able to receive ABA under the state Medicaid Quest health plans. For example, an individual, such as my son, who is provided with an annual Medicaid I/DD Waiver budget to cover community learning services and respite, cannot access entitled services because of inappropriate behaviors due to disability — **treatable by ABA** — defeating the purpose of services to keep such individuals at home and in the community, not an institution. The current Medicaid I/DD waiver's scope and purpose of services are limited, not only the number of service providers.
- Reference: **SR114, SD1, Adopted 2022**. Department of Human Services: The waiver services for individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities are delivered by the Department of Health's Developmental Disabilities Division. While they do not provide Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) per se, similar services are provided to individuals who are 21 and older." (March 21, 2022) https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/archives/measure_indiv_Archives.aspx?billtype=SR&billnumber=114&year=2022

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of pay rate increases and extending ABA coverage under Medicaid health plans to beneficiaries diagnosed with autism, age 21 and older.

Linda Elento, March 18, 2024 1:00 PM