

Testimony in Support of SB 244 – Autism Insurance Mandate

Our family has been doing our level best to support our son with autism in Colorado for the past 20 years. When he was 2 years old, our childcare providers and pediatrician recommended that he be evaluated. At that time, it took a full year to accomplish the evaluation and cost us over \$1,500. None of this was paid for by insurance.

After we were able to pay off the evaluation expenses, which took about 6 months, we attempted to get services for him so that his brain could adjust to this neurological condition. We knew he needed to communicate, socialize and engage in the world around him. The only service that we were able to get from our health insurance company was 16 visits of speech therapy. I tried every way imaginable to get the health insurance company to pay for needed services. However, after 6 months of trying, my husband was laid-off from his job. We found out later that this was typical behavior for this employer when a child was diagnosed with special needs.

I tell you this, because even after 20 years of working with my friend Betty Lehman to assure that children with autism in Colorado are able to receive medically necessary treatment, we have only been able to put a couple of dents in the barrel. Given the increase in the number of children diagnosed with this disorder, you need to know that the vast majority of these children in Colorado are NOT receiving appropriate care and treatment.

My son is now 24. He requires 24 hour line of sight care. Someone must know where he is and what he is doing every minute of the day, because he is a danger to himself and others. He has been tested by the state and it is documented that he requires the highest level of support in the Developmental Disability system. He now costs the state more than \$100,000 per year to cover his care.

This bill will provide some much needed medical care for children with autism. It is another dent in the barrel that we must take care of now. Children and adults do not "go away" just because we refuse to assist families to provide care and treatment. What happens over time is they become much more expensive. My son's medications alone cost over \$500/month. If he had received the care and treatment he needed when he was younger, I have no doubt that he could now be working and living with much less support than he now requires to keep him and the community safe. He was and is a smart person. His brain is however, severely disorganized.

Please give these kids and families a chance. Pass this bill and provide them with a little bit of help. They need it, and our state needs it.

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