

Notes for testimony regarding **Autism Insurance Bill**

Introduction:

My name is Mark Mannino and I am the father of a six year old son who has Autism. I am here to testify regarding my family's experiences with the services received under the Medicaid program called Children's Waiver Autism or the CWA program. My son was diagnosed with Autism after he turned 3 and as part of the diagnosis of Autism, we were given a recommendation to provide our son with 25 hours of intervention per week. Since my son was enrolled in preschool at the time, we were told the time in preschool counted towards the 25 hours per week of intervention. Preschool at the time was about 12 to 15 hours per week so that left us with an additional 10 hours of therapy that was recommended for our son.

In January 2007, I applied for admission to the CWA program and was accepted into this program in May 2007.

Condition at the start of CWA:

At the time my son started receiving services under CWA, he had the following behavioral and communication issues.

- 1) Spoke only using single words and some 2 word phrases and had a vocabulary of about 100 to 200 words.
- 2) Did not make requests using language.
- 3) Did not answer when asked questions.
- 4) Was only able to follow single step directions.
- 5) Unable to dress himself.
- 6) Unable to feed himself.
- 7) When he was frustrated he would get hysterical and it would take up to 20 minutes to calm him down.
- 8) Had a very limited diet.
- 9) Would flap his arms when he was excited. In particular, he would get very excited whenever he encountered automatic doors, elevators and escalators.

Progress at the conclusion of CWA:

After receiving therapy under CWA, here is a current summary of my son's condition.

- 1) Speaks in sentences.
- 2) Answers questions but responses generally limited to yes or no or short answer.
- 3) Does not engage in conversational speech with family or friends.
- 4) Follows multi-step directions.
- 5) Can dress himself with the exception of buttoning a shirt or tying shoes.
- 6) Able to feed himself except he still needs help with certain food items like ice cream.

- 7) Is potty trained.
- 8) Is performing at grade level in kindergarten in reading and math.
- 9) Eats many different types of food including some fruits and vegetables.
- 10) When he becomes frustrated, he rarely gets hysterical and in general takes only a few minutes to calm down.
- 11) Still occasionally flaps his arms when excited but not to the extent that he previously did.
- 12) Can print letters in a readable but sometimes sloppy manner.

#### Therapy Received Under CWA

We used three providers under CWA. Our first provider utilized home based therapy with an emphasis on parent training. We used this provider for about 10 months and received about 4 to 6 hours a week in therapy. The typical therapy session involved the therapist working with my son on behavioral and educational skills and demonstrating to one or both parents how to reinforce the skills that my son acquired in therapy.

The second provider that we used also utilized home based therapy under the model called Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy or more commonly known as ABA therapy. We received about 10 to 12 hours of therapy per week from this provider. The typical therapy session from this provider included a therapist working with my son for two hours on specific educational, motor skill and behavioral areas. As the therapy progressed, the emphasis in the therapy gravitated more towards getting my son to work independently on educational and motor skill tasks.

In addition to the providers mentioned, my son also received one hour of occupational therapy and one hour speech therapy from therapists at Children's Hospital.

#### Conclusion:

My son has made significant improvement since he began receiving therapy under the CWA program. When he started with this therapy, his speech was limited and he would get frustrated often and sometimes get hysterical. Through the guidance of the therapists provided from CWA, my son has been transformed into a child that can read and perform math at grade level (kindergarten) and can communicate his wants and needs to us and others. My son's motor skills also improved and he is now potty trained and able to feed and dress himself. The therapy that was provided also helped my wife and me as parents by teaching us effective strategies for helping our son. The improvements that my son made also helped us as a family by allowing my wife to continue with her college education in accounting. Our family feels very fortunate to have received therapy for our son under the CWA program.