

Dear Colorado Legislature,

I am sorry that I cannot be here today in person I am going to a medical conference in Boston this afternoon. I am a Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician and Operations Coordinator for the Colorado Autism Treatment Network Site. I would like to testify on behalf of the need for early, intensive behavioral intervention for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The National Research Council reviewed the available literature and recommended entry into treatment as soon as autism is suspected; 25 hours of intervention per week; parent training and involvement in treatment; ongoing assessment, program evaluation, and programmatic adjustment as needed; and intervention that focuses on communication, social interaction and play skills that can be generalized in a naturalistic setting. Naturalistic training models for children with autism implemented before age 3 result in 90% of children attaining functional use of language compared to 20% who begin intervention after age 5 (Koegel, 2000, Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities).

Functional use of language leads to better behavioral and medical outcomes. Children with language can participate in medical care by communicating symptoms. Children who are non-verbal are more likely to require continuous line of sight care to remain safe. Children who are non-verbal often develop aggressive behaviors as a way to communicate needs. Aggressive behavior leads to use of expensive medications with significant side effects such as weight gain and diabetes. Aggressive behavior also can lead to need for ER visits and inpatient management which is difficult for the child and family and extremely expensive.

It is time to consider autism specific behavioral interventions medically necessary. Please ensure that a bill is passed that provides funding for these services. It is horrible to have to tell families of a child with a new diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder about the National Research Council recommendations and then have to tell them that they will probably have to pay for most, if not all of it, out of pocket. This is important for children with autism, their families and for the overall wellbeing of the state of Colorado.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Ann Reynolds, M.D.