

SB\_244  
Colorado Health and Human Services Committee  
March 19, 2009

Helena Huckabee, Ph.D., BCBA

Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'm Doctor Helena Huckabee. I am a licensed Clinical Psychologist, a Pediatric Neuropsychologist and a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. I'm also the mother of a teenager with Autism who was diagnosed when I was in graduate school.

I have specialized in treatment, diagnosis, and research of Autistic Spectrum Disorders for over 12 years including establishing treatment programs for Autism at the Universities of Houston, Texas, and Colorado, and Texas Children's Hospital. I am currently Adjunct Faculty at the University of Denver.

You've heard testimony this afternoon that 20 years of research confirms that autism is treatable. Recognizing this fact, a 2009 Blue Cross/Blue Shield Special Report acknowledges that autism research involving no-treatment controls is unethical<sup>1</sup>.

Without adequate treatment, individuals with Autism are likely to remain mentally retarded or profoundly socially impaired. Research from the University of Connecticut found as many as 20% of individuals who received effective treatment at an adequate dose lost the diagnosis of any Autistic Spectrum Disorder after just 2 years of treatment<sup>2</sup>. Although some ABA services may be provided in schools, the attached Figure shows the outcome of only providing education<sup>3</sup> appears similar to no treatment conditions.

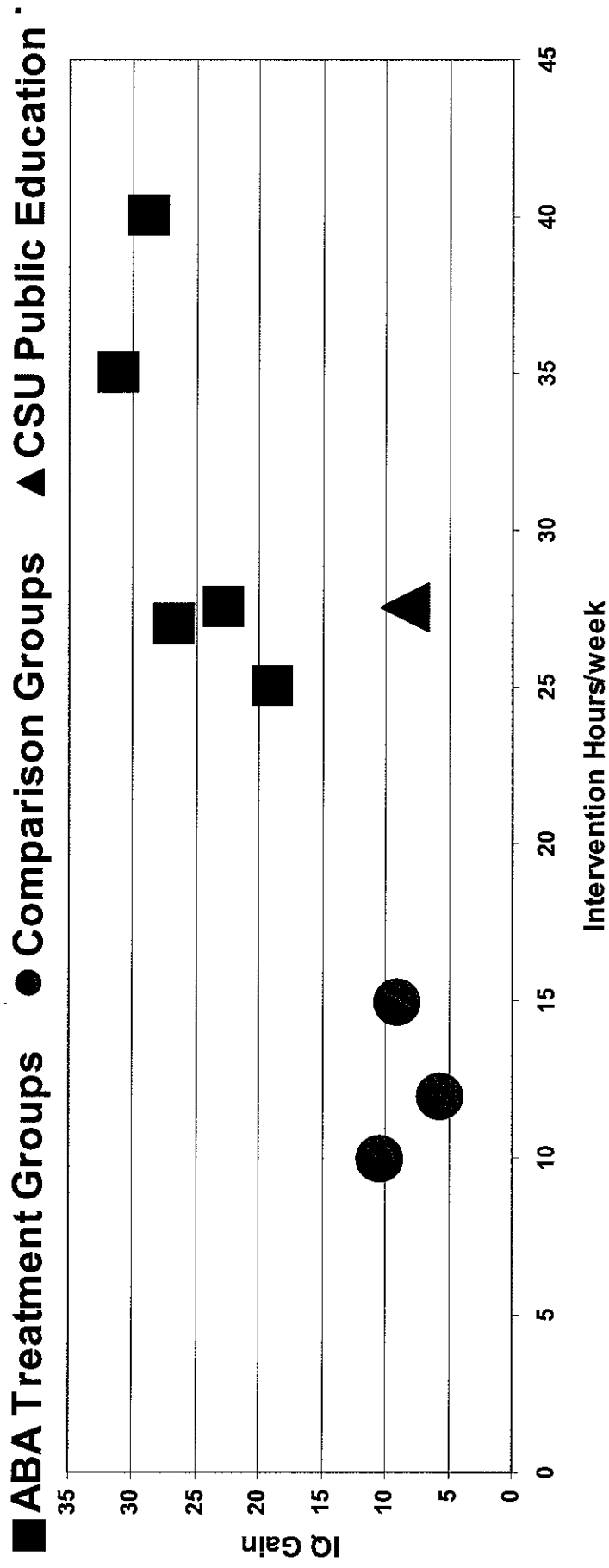
The Harvard School of Public Health<sup>4</sup> estimated families averaged \$32k/year in 2007 on behavior therapy until their child was age 8. These are costs that the Harvard authors acknowledge may require legal proceedings to secure. This is not purported to be adequate therapy to treat Autism. Indeed, non-profit organizations here in Denver already charge as much as \$65k/year for treatment of Autism. Since the average age of diagnosis for Autism in Colorado is 5 ½ years, coverage to age 6 would mean that most individuals would receive less than 6 months of treatment for a condition that is typically lifelong and costs twice as much as the typical American in direct medical costs<sup>5</sup>.

Although it is estimated that providing coverage for treatment of Autism would increase insurance premiums by only 1%<sup>6</sup>, inadequate treatment of Autism currently costs the state of Colorado billions of dollars. Since the societal costs of just one person with Autism are estimated to be \$3.2MM<sup>4</sup>, covering adequate treatment costs could provide the state of Colorado over \$555MM in otherwise lost income tax alone.

Passing this bill would mean that adequate and effective treatment for Autism is no longer only available for the very wealthy or very lucky and provide millions of dollars for the state of Colorado. I've cited my references on your handout.

# ABA Treatment vs ABA in Education

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1. Technology Evaluation Center (2009). Special report: Early intensive behavioral intervention based on Applied Behavior Analysis among children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. BlueCross BlueShield Association, Assessment Program, Vol. 25, No. 9, pp. 1-62.
2. Sutera, S., Pandey, J. et al. (2007). Predictors of optimal outcome in toddlers diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Vol 37(1), pp. 98-107.
3. California State University (2004).
4. Ganz, M. L. (2007). The lifetime distribution of the incremental societal costs of autism. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 161, pp. 343-349.
5. Alemayehu, B. & Warner, K. E. (2004). The lifetime distribution of health care costs. *Health Services Research* 39:3, pp. 627-642.
6. Boudier, J. N., Spielman, S. & Mandell, D. S. (2009). Brief report: Quantifying the impact of autism coverage on private insurance premiums. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Published online: February 13, 2009.