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NYSABA urges the Legislature to reject the Executive Budget's cut to our most vulnerable children & adults seeking behavioral health services

The \$9.6 million state budget cut to Medicaid Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services for the 2025-26 state fiscal year and a \$19 million cut for the 2026-27 state fiscal year are deeply concerning and we urge you to reject it. This cut harms our most vulnerable New Yorkers: children and adults with neurodevelopmental differences, and mental health diagnoses, including children in foster care and juvenile justice programs. These populations have waited years for the implementation of the ABA Medicaid benefit, and we should not introduce new roadblocks, but instead clear a path. It is also detrimental to the Governor's own plan to dramatically expand access to mental health care, reduce wait times, and ensure appropriate levels of care to correct our mental health care system, which has suffered from chronic underinvestment.

Behavior Analysis is the study and science of learning, and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) uses that science to improve socially significant behaviors in humans. In New York, we have a license and a certification for professionals to practice ABA, to deliver services to individuals with a mental health diagnosis and a prescription for treatment. ABA is a well-developed and distinct discipline with a strong scientific foundation. Its delivery involves analyzing individual needs and environmental conditions to enhance that individual's well-being, including decreasing dangerous behaviors (e.g. aggression, self-injury, etc.), teaching adaptive behaviors (e.g. communication, social skills, coping strategies, etc.), and increasing independence. ABA has been recognized as an effective treatment option for people with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

In 2012, the Legislature mandated that commercial insurance plans cover ABA for children who have autism, but their peers on Medicaid plans were not able to receive that same coverage. After much advocacy from the ABA community, Medicaid began covering ABA in 2021. Due to multiple barriers to implementation, the benefit was not widely used until 2023, as there were minimal providers and fewer consumers (who were able to access the benefit). The proposed cut feels like a reaction to this population finally being allowed to access the medical care they have been prescribed to receive and it is a step in the wrong direction for New York.

New York was the 49th state to implement Medicaid coverage of ABA. The full Medicaid benefit for ABA, which was approved by the Legislature, has not yet been implemented. It is intended for children with ASD, and children and adults with mental health diagnoses. If these cuts are implemented, many children will lose access to medically necessary services and there is a risk that they will demonstrate increases in dangerous behaviors and continued delays in learning skills to function as independently as possible. As a result, they may be hospitalized, institutionalized, or may require much more care as they become older. This cycle of delaying and denying care for children with behavioral needs often results in increased spending on more restrictive settings and interventions in their teenage and adult lives. Instead, we need to fund this benefit to ensure that children receive the care they need at the earliest possible point of intervention. This is not a step in the right direction for a state committed to transforming the continuum of mental health care and drastically reducing the number of individuals with unmet mental health needs throughout New York.

We cannot in good conscience allow the children and adults, who have been waiting for years for this benefit, to continue to wait, especially when we now have qualified NY licensed professionals available to serve them.

Please oppose Governor Hochul's misguided cuts to the Medicaid ABA benefit.

The New York State Association for Behavior Analysis was established to promote and to protect the integrity of the science and professional practice of behavior analysis within the state of New York.

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