

# California State Senator Anthony J. Portantino's Bill to Expand Access to Autism Treatment Approved by Senate Health Committee

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April 23, 2021 - Sacramento, California – Senate Bill 562, authored by Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D – La Canada), passed the Senate Health Committee this week. The measure will eliminate barriers to help patients



with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) access Behavior Health Treatment (BHT) in California.

“Early intervention is the key to helping our children live up to their potential and health insurance coverage for behavioral health treatment is critical,” **stated Senator Portantino.**

“Research has proven that children with autism greatly benefit from behavioral health treatments and show remarkable progress. SB 562 will allow them to get the treatment they need and deserve in a timely manner.”

Current law requires that health insurance companies cover all physician or psychologist prescribed medically necessary, evidence-based BHT for ASD. Due to a loophole in the law, patients with ASD are being denied coverage for physician and psychologist prescribed evidence-based BHT. In some cases, coverage is only being offered for one form of BHT. A shortage of network providers has also created a six to twelve month wait list for BHT services.

Additionally, all BHT providers are constrained by other statutory provisions that serve to allow insurance denials. These include the requirement for parental participation and restraints on the location. Children of working parents can be denied coverage for medically necessary treatment simply because the parent has to work and cannot attend every treatment session. Similarly, if a child must receive treatment at an after-school daycare location, they can be denied coverage simply because the setting is at a school.

SB 562 will eliminate the existing statutory obstacles and require health insurance coverage for all forms of medically necessary, evidence-based BHT for Californians with ASD without diminishing consumer protections. The measure expands the number of qualified professionals by authorizing already State certified professionals to administer BHT within their professional competence, thereby reducing or eliminating the waiting list for services.

SB 562 also details the requirements for a Qualified Autism Service Paraprofessional to insure health insurance coverage, including background checks to protect California children. The measure will protect the interests of California consumers and the state by closing the loopholes in the law and ensuring that every Californian is covered.

“Currently, insurance primarily covers a form of intervention called ABA, which is based on behaviorism,” **stated Dr. Diane Cullinane, Co-Founder and Executive Director Emerita of Professional Child Development Associates, a non-profit organization located in Pasadena.** “Developmental approaches are based on the idea that children overcome developmental challenges best through building warm, trusting relationships that encourage a child’s own motivation, initiative, and creativity. There is now a preponderance of evidence that these approaches are effective. With the passage of SB 562, authored by Senator Anthony Portantino, families will finally have a choice of intervention approaches for their child.”

SB 562 is sponsored by the DIR/Floortime Coalition of California, Professional Child Development Associates, and Cherry Crisp Entertainment and Productions. Supporters of the bill include: Center for Developmental Play and Learning, Child Development Institute, Dr. Barbara Stroud, Clinical Psychologist, Fresno City College, Greenhouse Therapy Center, Holding Hands Pediatric Therapy and Adult Services, NeuroRelational Framework Institute, Positive Development, the Washington Elks Therapy Programs for Children, INC., and Touchstone Family Development Center.

Source: Senator Anthony J. Portantino