

CALIFORNIA ACADEMY of CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

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June 30, 2025

The Honorable Suzette Martinez Valladares

California State Senate, District 23

1021 O Street, Suite 7140

Sacramento CA, 95814

Re: SB 402 (Valladares) Health care coverage: autism.

Position: OPPOSE

Dear Senator Valladares:

The California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry represents nearly 2,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists members. The statewide organization's mission is to represent the interests of its members and the mental health of children and families through advocacy, policy development, and access to mental health care.

We at CALACAP greatly appreciate Senator Valladares' longtime commitment to supporting the autism community. However, we represent parents and providers who **strongly oppose SB 402**. While the intention to improve the regulation of Qualified Autism Service Providers (QASPs) is appreciated, this bill would increase the barriers to autism care for families seeking autism care, especially those requiring therapeutic approaches other than ABA.

SB 402 would move the definitions for the Qualified Autism Service Provider, Qualified Autism Service Professional, and Qualified Autism Service Paraprofessional from their original location over to the Business and Professions Code. These important definitions were duly placed by Legislative Counsel in the Health and Safety Code and Insurance Code from the time of the original autism insurance mandate, SB 946. All subsequent bills related to autism healthcare coverage have followed suit. Creating a bill to move parts of the law to another section is unprecedented and solves nothing.

SB 402 would prevent smooth implementation of SB 805 (Portantino) which passed in 2023 to provide equity of access for children who are prescribed other evidence-based approaches to Behavioral Health Treatment such as DIRFloortime, PACT, PLAY Project, JAML, RT, etc. Regulations are being currently created by the Department of Developmental Services to guide SB 805 implementation. Confusion created by SB 402 would very likely delay or prevent insurance company authorizations and claims for autistic children's services.

SB 402 moves the definitions of autism health care behavioral health treatment practitioners to a different section of code in order to pave the way for one more attempt at a licensing scheme for ABA practitioners; future bills to create a licensing scheme will be heard in a more favorable Committee. The legislature rejected ABA practitioner licensing schemes before because it is wrong to license practitioners in only one therapeutic approach. California already has robust and sufficient licensing boards to oversee and regulate the health care professions. A licensed healthcare professional is trained and qualified to evaluate all the therapeutic methods and recommend the best one for a particular patient. *Licensing* a practitioner in a therapeutic method, ABA, is unprecedented in California and commercially-driven.

Licensing of practitioners of just one method (ABA) will create a vast inequity in access to care for children who are recommended for a different method.

California is already facing a significant shortage of practitioners qualified to provide Behavioral Health Treatment (BHT) services. The bill will create additional regulatory hurdles, potentially destabilizing an already fragile workforce. This will lead to further delays in care for individuals diagnosed with autism at a time when early intervention is crucial for long-term success. The bill does not clearly demonstrate how this transition will enhance the safety, quality of care, or professional accountability of practitioners. The existing code already offers a functional regulatory framework for QAS Providers and QAS Professionals without the detrimental impacts tied to reclassification. These include unnecessary workforce disruptions and the additional burden placed on families to access vital treatment options.

These workforce shortage and disruption concerns have been acknowledged by Anna Billy in the Senate consultant's analysis, as well as by numerous provider and family organizations. Rather than improving oversight or benefiting consumer safety, SB 402 risks creating harmful roadblocks, exacerbating delays in care access, and further straining underserved communities.

Families impacted by autism are already navigating complex systems to secure the services they need. Adding barriers for service providers will inevitably limit accessibility, leaving more families without critical therapy options. This will result in longer waitlists, higher costs, and a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities.

Thank you for understanding the problems presented by SB 402. We urgently request you to reject SB 402 and consider alternative measures that will genuinely help families impacted by autism to access the care they need in a timely manner. Please let us know if CALACAP could offer any assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ijeaku', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ijeoma Ijeaku, MD, MPH, DFAPA
CALACAP President

