March 21, 2014

The Honorable Shirley Webber

Chair, Budget Sub-Committee on Health

State Capitol, Room

Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: ABA Coverage in Medi-Cal

Assemblymember Webber:

We are writing today to urge your support for coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy to Medi-Cal recipients and respectfully request this issue be placed on the agenda of the Senate Budget Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services for further debate and discussion.

ABA therapy is the most commonly-prescribed, well-researched, evidence-based treatment available for autism. Its use for individuals with autism has been endorsed by the U.S. Surgeon General, the National Research Council, the National Institutes of Mental Health, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others.

In 2011, SB 946 (Steinberg) was signed into law to require all state-regulated health insurance plans to provide coverage formedically necessarybehavioral health treatment for pervasive developmental disorder or autism. This was defined to include ABA. Since the passage of SB 946, countless children have received treatment through their health plans. In addition, families obtaining coverage through Covered California and CalPERS will also have access to this life-changing treatment. However, at the time SB 946 was passed, the state was in the midst of a fiscal crisis and was unable to provide these same services to families on Medi-Cal.

State finances have improved dramatically since 2011, and it is time the state recognize ABA as a medically necessary behavioral health treatment for all of its citizens.

We are aware of at least ten states are now covering ABA therapy in their Medicaid programs with coverage in other states primarily being provided through the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment program (EPSDT). Under the federal Medicaid act, states that chose to participate in the federal Medicaid program must provide EPSDT services for eligible children under the age of 21; this includes preventative and rehabilitative services. ABA falls within this scope; excluding it from Medi-Cal, when medically necessary, is counter to the broad EPSDT mandate in the federal Medicaid Act.

1 in 88 children are impacted by autism, making it more common than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes and pediatric AIDS combined. In California, approximately 42% of children are enrolled in Medi-Cal. The state cannot afford to fail these children. Paying the cost of ABA for autistic children will ultimately save public funds. Children who do not receive treatment are likely to become life-long dependents on government support. The long-term reduction in special education costs could reach $12 billion. The reduced welfare and social service costs could be well over $39 billion and as high as $64 billion.

For these reasons, we urge your support to provide ABA to Medi-Cal enrollees. We look forward to working with you, the California Legislature, and the Administration on this very important issue.

Sincerely,



Lorri Shealy Unumb

Autism Speaks, Vice President, State Government Affairs

Cc: Assemblymember Nancy Skinner, Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee

 Members of the Senate Budget Sub-Committee No.1 on Health and Human Services

 Speaker Toni Atkins