

## CO-SPONSORSHIP MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** April 19, 2021  
**TO:** All Legislators  
**FROM:** Senator André Jacque  
Representative David Murphy  
**RE:** **Co-sponsorship of LRB 1844/1, relating to:** support for Early Access to Autism Diagnosis and Treatment

**DEADLINE: Noon on April 29, 2021**

The rates of diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are on the rise both locally and throughout the country. Wisconsin is falling behind its neighboring states in the early identification and treatment of children with autism. According to the Wisconsin Surveillance of Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities System (WISADDS), the rate of autism diagnosis in Wisconsin (1 in 60) is well below the national rate (1 in 54) and the rate in Minnesota (1 in 44). Furthermore, less than half of children with autism in Wisconsin are diagnosed by age 4, and 28% still do not have a diagnosis by age 8, which is the timeframe during which the most significant treatment gains can be achieved.

A recent study by the Wisconsin Autism Providers Association (WAPA) estimated that over 1300 children with autism are currently (August 2020) on waitlists for treatment; and children with Medicaid funding wait an average of 6 to 18 months to begin a treatment program depending on where they live, with the city of Milwaukee and rural areas being the most difficult to serve.

To raise awareness of the access barriers to autism diagnosis and treatment that exist in Wisconsin, the Joint Legislative Council hosted a [Symposia Series on Early Access to Autism Treatment](#) in September 2020. The Series presented information on the barriers that Wisconsin families and children face in accessing early diagnosis and treatment of autism and identified options for enhancing access to early diagnosis and promoting treatment that is based on evidence-based medical practices.

It was learned that several factors contribute to Wisconsin falling behind in diagnosing children with autism and the wait lists that exist for treatment, including:

- Treatment providers having insufficient staff to offer services to all children with autism.
- Inequities in treatment access for ethnic minorities and rural families who may not be able to travel to a treatment center or who cannot access home-based services.
- Low Medicaid reimbursement rates that have resulted in large provider organizations leaving the state, out of state (national) companies only treating children who have commercial insurance, and existing providers limiting or capping enrollment to remain solvent.

In order to address these significant challenges that exist for Wisconsin families in need of early access to diagnosis and treatment of autism, I am proposing a 25% reimbursement rate increase for all autism treatment codes under the Medicaid behavioral treatment benefit as of July 1, 2021. This increase would bring Wisconsin Medicaid rates closer to our neighboring states and is consistent with commercial insurance rates and practices. The impact of the proposal would support increased wages and allow providers to attract more staff to address diagnosis and treatment waitlists and to provide more access to services in underserved areas of the state.

This legislation is supported by the following groups:

Wisconsin Autism Providers Association  
Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin  
Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin  
Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin  
Council of Autism Service Providers (CASP)  
Wisconsin Association for Behavior Analysis (WisABA)  
Mental Health America of WI  
Milwaukee Coalition for Children's Mental Health  
Wisconsin Early Autism Project (WEAP)  
Caravel Autism Health  
ABA of WI  
Arrow Academy  
Achieving Collaborative Treatment (ACT)  
Autism Intervention Milwaukee (AIM)  
Autism Treatment for Children (ATC)  
Beyond ABA  
Beyond Behavior  
Center for Autism and Related Disorders  
Create Behavior Solutions  
FamilyPath Autism Services  
Fox Valley Autism Treatment Program  
Genesee Community Services  
Great Lakes Behavior Analysis  
InBloom Autism Services  
Inspiring Minds (DBA: IMPACT)  
KGH Autism Services  
Mercy Health  
Next Step Clinic  
Partners in Excellence  
Pediatric Psychology Associates, LLC & Autism Behavioral Network  
Phoenix Behavioral Health Services  
Reaching Your Potential  
Skylight Autism Center  
Sonnenberg Consultants  
SSM-Health Wisconsin  
STRIVE Behavioral Solutions

**If you would like to cosponsor this legislation, please contact Senator Jacque's office (6-3512) or Representative Murphy's office (6-7500) by Noon on April 29th. Co-sponsors will be added to both the Senate and Assembly bills unless otherwise requested.**

*Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau*

This bill increases the reimbursement rates for behavioral treatment services related to autism under the Medical Assistance program by 25 percent. The Medical Assistance program is a joint federal and state program that provides health services to individuals who have limited financial resources