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March 13, 2009

Thomas P. Gaffey, Co-Chair
Andrew M. Fleishmann, Co-Chair
Education Committee
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Gaffey and Mr. Fleishman,

I am writing you today in support of Raised Bill #6666, Section 7. This bill is one of significant importance to ensure that children with autism are provided evidence-based educational services by qualified professionals who have documented graduate-level coursework and significant hours of training in Applied Behavior Analysis.

As a licensed psychologist and Board Certified Behavior Analyst, I represent the professional organization within the state that supports the ethical practice and continuing education of Board Certified Behavior Analysts within the State of Connecticut. As the Director of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Initiative at Saint Joseph College, I am responsible for the development of graduate level training opportunities for in-service teachers and other certified professionals in effective practices for the education of children with autism, of which Applied Behavior Analysis has the only empirical support for its effectiveness. In all of my roles, I view the need to support the effective delivery of service as the paramount responsibility of school systems as is the continued expansion of promoting evidence-based practice to address the needs of a growing group of students, those with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Once considered a low incidence disability, autism now affects roughly 1 in 150 children in the United States. Every school district in the state now has children with this disability on their rosters. The federal law, IDEA 2004, specifically mandates that special education be based upon strategies that have been validated by peer-reviewed research. Interventions derived from the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis have consistently been shown and recommended as the methodology that has met the stringent requirements of empirical validation across multiple groups of reviewers. Applied Behavior Analysis encompasses a great number of strategies to address challenging behavior, language skills, social and adaptive functioning and instruction across academic domains to name a few. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board holds certificants to a minimum level of training and supervised experience in behavior analytic principles, a necessity for evaluating the complexities of human behavior. This certification program is consistent with other professional disciplines that work with children with special needs who must have a valid license or certification.

The Connecticut General Statute that defines special education states that the definition of "related service providers" is derived from IDEA as amended from time to time. In the most recent revision of IDEA, related service providers were defined as those professionals including "developmental, corrective, and other support services" including but not necessarily limited to those already monitored by the state, and other services "as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education". Behavior Analytic services are routinely outlined on students Individual Education Plans and would therefore meet these criteria. Additionally, IDEA states that related service personnel qualifications are either "consistent with any State-approved or State-recognized certification...or other comparable requirements that apply to the professional discipline in which those personnel are providing special education or related services". With this federal legislation already in place, and a national certification program already in existence, the State Department of Education should recognize the national certification program for behavior analysts, and mandate that school districts follow the existing protocols in place for related service providers, i.e., obtain and maintain a copy of each person's proof of certification, and submit an annual attestation to the state.

One point of clarification may be in order for the summary statement associated with this bill. In its wording, it seems to imply that all children with Autism should receive services from a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), a position that would contradict the individualization of IEP's for children with autism. While clearly not the intent of the Bill, it may lead to confusion regarding the content of the Bill and lead to significant resistance from other certified professionals supporting the education of children with autism, and rightly so. The Bill supports the utilization of a BCBA when Applied Behavior Analysis services are included as part of a child's IEP. I wholeheartedly support this position as do my colleagues who are members of the Connecticut Association for Behavior Analysis.

We have great safeguards in place for consumers of a wide variety of services, we have not yet secured sufficient protection for some of our most disabled students by mandating specific qualifications for individuals developing and implementing interventions that are meant to support students' educational benefits from their school programs. This is inconsistent with all other requirements for individuals delivering services in schools and need immediate correction. We are hoping you will join our effort to protect the health and well being of the children we serve and recognize the certification that allows for that protection.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the positions outlined in this letter at the address above.

Sincerely,

John D. Molteni, Ph.D., BCBA
President
Connecticut Association for Behavior Analysis