

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is James Hoko and I am a resident of Madison, CT. I am also the Director of Behavior Services and Autism Programs for Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) in North Haven, CT. I am writing to express my strong support for sections 23 – 29 of SB 1089 “An Act Concerning Mental Health Services.”

I have provided behavior analytic services to children, families, and school districts in Connecticut for more than a quarter of a century. I was hired by ACES in 1988 inspired by the people I met in Connecticut who were engaging, inspiring, and motivated to help Connecticut’s children. ACES mission as a Regional Educational Service Center was to provide cutting-edge educational services to more than 25 school districts in south-central CT and beyond. At the time of my hire, I was only the 2nd Behavior Analyst hired by ACES and most of my coworkers had no idea what a Behavior Analyst was or did.

Today, I direct a department of more than two dozen Behavior Analysts and more than 120 paraprofessionals who provide behavior analytic services to more than 30 school districts. The Behavior Analysts work collaboratively and effectively in teams with professionals of other disciplines, with parents, and with district administrators to provide optimal clinical and educational services to Connecticut’s very special children. Their coworkers know, respect, and appreciate the skill a Behavior Analyst brings. It has been a true success story for children in Connecticut.

Of the more than two dozen Behavior Analysts who work at ACES, none are licensed to do what they do—because there is no license available in Connecticut. This is problematic and unfortunate. Parents, distraught and desperately seeking services for their children, are often confused and unsure about professionals who are not licensed by the state to provide services. This confusion and distress is unfortunately warranted as I have personally witnessed several sad cases in which individuals have represented themselves as “behavior analysts”, “behavior specialists”, or “behaviorists” when in fact they have had little or no training in the science of Applied Behavior Analysis. These situations have not surprisingly had negative impact on children and families.

It is time that Connecticut joined the group of 19 states (including NY and MA) who have already put licensure in place for Behavior Analysts. Doing so will alleviate the confusion and concern of families by insuring that those providing behavior analytic services are competent and qualified. It will protect Connecticut children by preventing individuals from misrepresenting their skills and services. And, through incorporation into the new Medicaid regulations, it can enable a family to more easily obtain private insurance funding for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully request that you vote to pass SB 1089 sections 23-29 as written.

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Director, Behavior Services and Autism Programs