

Suzanne Letso, M.A., BCBA
Chief Executive Officer
Alaska Center for Autism
17545 North Eagle River Loop Road
Eagle River, AK 99577

March 18, 2014

Dear Rep. Higgins, Rep. Keller and Members of the House Health & Social Services Committee:

I am writing to you in support of HB 361, an act relating to the licensing of behavior analysts.

I am a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) overseeing autism programs in Connecticut and Alaska. We are currently operating a private, non-profit school for children with autism in Eagle River, and are providing consultative services both in and outside the Greater Anchorage area. I currently employ 6 people who reside in Alaska, one of whom is a BCBA, and two of who are completing their coursework to become BCBA's. In addition, there are five other BCBA's in our organization who are regularly in Alaska supervising Applied Behavior Analytic (ABA) programs in various locations around the state.

Licensure of behavior analysts is critical to the provision of ABA within the state of Alaska. This will facilitate implementation of the autism insurance bill enacted last year. It will also ensure that those providing ABA services are appropriately qualified, and have undergone a background check – including those who are not AK residents. It will enable Alaskan residences that have completed Alaskan-based university coursework to remain in Alaska rather than leaving the state because they cannot utilize their education and experience here. Perhaps most importantly, it will protect consumers of ABA services and will enable children with autism and other disabilities who are currently out of state to someday be able to return home.

For years, both state and federal funds including military funding have been utilized to support ABA programming, as well as families who privately fund ABA services for people with autism in the state. Just in the last few years alone, the Anchorage Public School System has spent several million dollars on behavior analytic services for children with autism. Without licensure this will remain an unregulated "cottage industry" with no consumer protections in place.

This bill will have an immediate and long-term impact on the availability and quality of ABA services for people with autism in the state. But it will likely also benefit others in the state in the future because BCBA's also work with an increasing variety of other populations including, but not limited to our aging population, our prison

population, those with traumatic brain injury, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and in manufacturing facilities for example. As the number of BCBA's in AK increase, at least some of these professionals may begin to expand their practice to help some of these other populations as well as people with autism. Which makes it even more critical that licensure of BCBA's be established as soon as possible.

There are already 17 states that have enacted regulatory programs for behavior analysts, including North Dakota which has even fewer BCBA's than Alaska does (as of today, there are only 5 BCBA residing in that state), and a number of other states including Connecticut are in the process of seeking licensure as well.

In terms of the cost of establishing a licensing program, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board can help implement the licensing process. I'm sure Dr. James Carr, the Chief Executive Officer of this nonprofit organization would be happy to speak with the committee leadership and/or this committee regarding this option. Dr. Carr can be reached at carr@bacb.com.

Yours truly,
Suzanne Letso, M.A., BCBA
Chief Executive Officer
Connecticut Center for Child Development/Alaska Center for Autism