

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## REPRESENTATIVE DAN SADDLER

### SPONSOR STATEMENT

#### House Bill 361

*“An Act relating to licensing of behavior analysts.”*

Autism is a significant and growing problem in Alaska. Statistics show that one in 110 Alaska children – about 1 percent – are born with this developmental disability, characterized by a diminished ability to communicate, social isolation, and other symptoms.

While not curable, autism is treatable. Scientific, peer-reviewed studies have shown that early intensive treatment in the form of Applied Behavioral Analysis offers the best opportunity to help people with autism improve their ability to function productively in society.

Applied Behavior Analysis is recognized as the basis for the most effective form of treatment for autism by the U.S. Surgeon General, The National Institute of Child Health, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. You can best understand ABA as behavior modification therapy: It seeks to encourage appropriate behavior by assessing and managing the relationship between the environment and the desired behavior.

Forty years of research shows that nearly half of people with autism who receive intensive early intervention and treatment do not require lifelong services and support -- and half can achieve normal functioning after two to three years. This can mean lifetime savings of \$200,000 to \$1.1 million for a person through the age of 55.

One of the most important elements in successful autism treatment is having it provided by well-trained behavioral therapists – those who hold the nationally recognized credential of Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst, or BCBA.

To qualify as a BCBA, applicants must have a minimum of a master’s degree, plus extensive training and experience requirements of up to 1,500 hours of supervised practice in the field, 225 hours of graduate-level classroom work, or a year’s experience teaching ABA at the university level. They must also pass the challenging BCBA certification examination. The Board-Certified Assistant Behavioral Analyst, or BCaBA credential, requires slightly lower standards.

The state already supports the training of BCBA’s through a grant to the Center for Human Development, at the University of Alaska Anchorage. There are about 20 to 30 BCBA’s and BCaBA’s in Alaska today, although not all of them are currently working in the field.

Under current state law, Alaskans with BCBAAs cannot bill health insurance companies or Medicaid for their services at a rate that reflects their high degree of training and professional skill because they are not formally licensed.

HB 361 addresses this situation by providing for those holding the BCBA or BCaBA credentials in Alaska to be licensed by the Division of Professional Licensing, in the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. Fourteen other states currently provide licensing and regulate behavior analysts. This approach has the strong support of Alaska BCBAAs and of national autism advocacy groups.

By ensuring licensing and higher standards of practice for BCBAAs and BCaBAAs, HB 361 will:

- encourage more people to provide autism services in Alaska
- offer higher reimbursement rates for professional providers
- provide better outcomes for Alaska children with autism
- save the state money by avoiding the need for costly institutional care, and
- improve the quality of life for hundreds of Alaskans and their families.