

July 28, 2016

The Honorable Ricardo Lara
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento CA, 95814

RE: AB 796 (Nazarian) -Health care coverage: autism and pervasive developmental disorders – OPPOSE

Dear Senator Lara:

At its July 27, 2016 meeting, the Board of Psychology (Board) adopted an **Oppose** position on **AB 796**. The bill would require the State Department of Developmental Services, with input from stakeholders, to update regulations to set forth the minimum standards of education, training, and professional experience for qualified autism service professionals and paraprofessionals as well as delete the sunset date of this provision, thereby extending the operation of existing law which requires insurance coverage for behavioral health treatment (BHT) for Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) indefinitely.

The Board supports providing reimbursable services for those with PDD or ASD. However, we believe that in order to ensure a basic level of competence for those providing the services, oversight in the form of state licensure and periodical review in the form of a sunset provision is crucial to the safe provision of care. If AB 796 is passed as written, it will mandate insurance providers and Medi-Cal cover services provided by unlicensed and sometimes unqualified providers without consideration for the protection of consumers or the qualifications or lack of qualifications of the providers.

Insurance reimbursement for these services began with the passage of SB 946 (Steinberg) on October 9, 2011. SB 946 required the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) to convene an Autism Advisory Task Force (Task Force) by February 1, 2012. The purpose of the Task Force was to develop recommendations regarding medically necessary BHT for individuals with ASD or PDD, as well as the appropriate qualifications, training and supervision for providers of such treatment. The Task Force concluded that all "top level" (undefined) providers should be licensed by the state, and set forth a process for establishing a new professional license for "Licensed Behavioral Health Practitioner." AB 796 falls short of this recommendation.

The Board of Psychology's mission is to advance quality psychological services for Californians by ensuring ethical and legal practice and supporting the evolution of the profession.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this position, please feel free to contact the Board's Executive Officer, Antonette Sorrick, at (916) 574-7113. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SC Phillips', with a stylized flourish at the end.

STEPHEN C. PHILLIPS, JD, PsyD
President, Board of Psychology

cc: Assembly Member Adrin Nazarian
Senate Appropriations Committee
Senate Appropriations Committee Consultant
Senate Republican Caucus