

August 12, 2022

My name is Kate Weitz, my husband, Roger, and I have an 11-year-old son, Freddie, on the autism spectrum. We live in Omaha, Nebraska.

I'm sure a lot of testimony you will hear today will speak to the importance of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) for children on the spectrum. I can say ABA has been instrumental in teaching our son how better to navigate the world, but I'll leave the studies and numbers to the experts. I will, however, attempt to convey the helplessness that you feel as a parent once your child is diagnosed.

When you receive the autism diagnosis, it can be quite upsetting but also a relief – after years of developmental delays and constant worry we now have a named diagnosis and somewhere to start. Once you begin the research process you start to realize what one is up against. Virtually everywhere you call to procure services (not just ABA but Physical therapy, speech therapy ,etc.) has a waiting list. We went onto several waiting lists, many we did not hear back from, with one ABA provider didn't call us back for roughly 18 months. By now you've heard the ABA is critical in the early intervention stage, getting quality care before child turns 5 is extremely important. Now imagine waiting a year and half to get your 3 year old child into the 'gold standard' autism intervention.

I'm not telling you this to pull back the curtain on lack of services in the state, this is a systemic issue nationwide. A diagnosis and lack of service providers leaves families panicked but also extremely vulnerable. If a company or organization offers a family the opportunity for ABA for their child, they take it. With services so scarce one does not have the luxury of shopping around to find the best fit. Anything is better than nothing right?

Our family was able to secure a company to provide Freddie ABA a few months after diagnosis. But the modality of the ABA this company provided actually caused more harm than good. What's the recourse for a family if crucial therapy is not up to standards? Who do they report to? I can move on to another company but who's to say they are any better or what if they're worse? Since we were still on waiting lists for other organizations, we ended up looking out of state for a provider that aligned better with our goals. We are and were very fortunate to have the resources to be able to look and secure quality intervention outside of the state. So many families in Nebraska do not have that luxury.

Therefore, I am submitting this testimony in full support of the licensure for Behavior Analysts in the state of Nebraska. While this action will certainly not fix the state of autism services in Nebraska, it will undoubtedly better protect families affected by autism searching for the best care for their children.

Sincerely,
Kate Noble Weitz

