

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

October 3, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Room H405 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Room H405 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Rogers and Ranking Members Mikulski and Lowey:

We urge you to include funding in the final version of the FY 2017 Department of Defense Appropriations Act (H.R. 5293) that would allow military children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to continue receiving Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) treatment under TRICARE.

Currently, TRICARE beneficiaries with ASD receive ABA therapy under the autism care demonstration program, which began on July 25, 2014 and is slated to end on December 31, 2016. ABA therapy is an intensive one-on-one therapy usually conducted at the home of the recipient. One of the objectives of the demonstration program was to provide a single, uniform benefit to the estimated 26,000 TRICARE beneficiaries with ASD, and approximately 40% of eligible beneficiaries receive ABA services under this program.

Effective April 1, 2016, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) adjusted TRICARE reimbursement rates to providers of ABA therapy. These new reimbursement rates were based on two DHA-commissioned studies, by RAND Corporation and Kennell and Associates, and adjusted for localities. Although some geographic areas, such as large metropolitan areas, saw an increase in reimbursement rates, many locations saw dramatic cuts. Military bases, many of which are located in suburban or rural areas, witnessed substantial decreases in reimbursement rates. These cuts were imposed despite indications from various parts of the country that there were ABA provider shortages, and in some locations, no providers at all. Both before and since the April 1 rate cuts, military families are confronting ABA provider shortages in Washington State, Fort Hood and Fort Bliss, TX; Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth, KS; Wright Patterson AFB, OH; Fort Bragg, NC; Fort Benning, GA; and Fort Campbell, KY.

Both military families and providers are displeased with these reduced reimbursement rates. Military children face unique challenges resulting from their parent's military service – like frequent moves, deployments, and other disruptions in care – and we should not create additional barriers to care. A large group of stakeholders have also stated their opposition to DHA's cuts for ABA services for military children, including Autism Speaks, Easter Seals, the National Military Family Association, the TRICARE for Kids Coalition, Military Officer's Association, Children's Hospital Association, and the San Diego Military Advisory Council.

In light of these cuts to reimbursement rates and associated shortages of providers, an amendment to H.R. 5293 was proposed and adopted by voice vote on the House Floor, providing \$32 million to reverse the cuts in reimbursement rates to providers of ABA services to military dependents with ASD that the DHA implemented on April 1, 2016. Of note, both the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2017 included language that would reinstate the reimbursement rates to ABA providers that were in effect as of March 31, 2016. In addition to supporting the will of Congress, the \$32 million in appropriations would help preserve the success of the autism care demonstration program.

We request that you include \$32 million in the final appropriations bill that provides funding for the Department of Defense for FY 2017. These funds will ensure that military children with ASD in need of therapy can obtain the services they and their families deserve.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



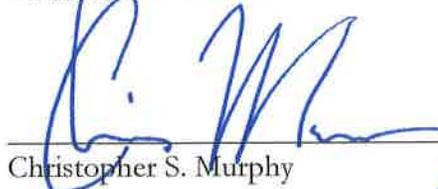
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator