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GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



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DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELawe KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 9, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 450 – RELATING TO AUTISM.**

Hearing: Monday, February 10, 2025, Time 1:20 p.m.  
Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the measure, offers comments, and requests an amendment. DHS requests support for the executive budget, which includes a request for recurring funding to sustain the increased funding for reimbursement rates applied behavioral analysis (ABA) services.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this bill is to make an appropriation to increase funding for the Department of Human Services' Med-QUEST Division (MQD) reimbursement for applied behavioral analysis (ABA) services.

DHS appreciates the intent to provide increased funding for ABA services. In 2023, Senate Concurrent Resolution 132, Senate Resolution 152, and House Resolution 207 requested DHS to take necessary steps to ensure adequate provider rates are established for ABA services. MQD's contracted actuarial firm, Miliman, completed the study, and DHS submitted the study to the Legislature in December 2023. The study uses a payment model based on an Independent Rate Model methodology, which means building the component parts of the rates from the ground up. Key components of this rate study included outreach and engagement

with ABA provider agencies, providers, and their associations, collecting provider agency cost and wage survey data, and getting feedback on draft rate calculations. The rate study provided three scenarios (Scenarios 1, 2, and 3). In the 2024 legislative session, the Legislature did provide funding at Scenario 1 (low scenario) to increase the rates for ABA services. The increases were implemented starting January 1, 2025.

DHS agrees that increased rates are necessary and should be sustained. It will be increasingly difficult to have access to the full range of ABA services if the increases are not sustained. For this reason, the executive budget includes a request for recurring funding to sustain the increased reimbursement rates for ABA (Total: \$6,500,000M: \$2,690,000 A State funds/\$3,810,000 N Federal Funds). DHS respectfully requests support of the appropriation is made through the executive budget request, and not a bill, so that the increases are included in the DHS base budget.

Should this bill move forward, DHS requests an amendment deleting from Section 2, page 3, starting at line 20 through page 4, line 5:

~~"...provided that the department of human services shall obtain the maximum federal matching funds available for this expenditure; provided further that the department of human services shall pursue all funding sources known to the State, including private grants, prior to expending any general revenues appropriated pursuant to this Act."~~

Medicaid funding includes federal matching and state funds for every covered Medicaid expenditure. Also, federal Medicaid matching rates are set by the federal government, and all covered Medicaid expenditures automatically apply the appropriate federal matching rate. Thus, the mandate to obtain "maximum federal matching funds" is unnecessary and would complicate implementation of any rate increases. Further, private grants are not allowed to be the state fund portion of Medicaid expenditures. Thus, we respectfully request that these clauses be deleted.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 7:43:39 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We are in support.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:07:11 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jee Eun Yasuda	Testifying for Hoomau therapy	Support	In Person

## Comments:

I started RBT to help my ADHD son with ABA. It surely helped my son while helping my clients. They are truly angels just need extra consistent love and help that they deserve. This job gets me nervous for unoredictable behaviors of the client that could happen during the session throughout the day but it's very rewarding and we deserve and better paying environment. I've worked with a client in a school setting and It's only been three months with him but it broke my ears that I need to see a specialist and waiting to see a PCP for a referral but I'm not leaving this field because in the end they learn lots of life skills, language skills, and academic improvements and it's huge becoming an independent adult.



WE LOVE WHAT WE DO

Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Monday, February 10, 2025  
1:20 pm  
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE  
Conference Room 225  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street

**SUPPORT SB450 RELATING TO AUTISM**

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of SB450**. BAYADA is a not-for-profit health care company committed to serving our community. We provide services across the state, with behavioral health services for QUEST members on Oahu and Maui.

As a behavioral health service provider, we have struggled to meet the needs of children with autism on Med-QUEST due to the increased costs of operating a business without increased rates for our services. QUEST rates for the coverage of intensive behavioral therapy (IBT) for treatment of children under 21 years of age with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), also referred to as applied behavior analysis (ABA), were set in 2015 and have not increased, despite the increased costs of living and increased costs for employers over the last eight years. Wages have gone up nearly 30% since 2015 in Hawai'i, forcing businesses to shoulder the cost without proportionate rate increases, making it harder to attract candidates and businesses to the field of supporting individuals with autism and their families.

We greatly appreciate the efforts taken in 2024 to include funding for increased rates for ABA QUEST funded services. **These funds were nonrecurring, only providing an increase for 2025, therefore it is imperative we pass additional legislation in the 2025 session to maintain these rates.**

**Without the increased rates, we are not able to adequately serve the children with autism and their families who need us.** As an organization, our values are compassion, excellence, and reliability; however, due to difficulties in attracting and retaining staff we find ourselves troubled that we cannot consistently deliver these values to our clients. Currently, **we must maintain a waitlist for clients to access services because there is more demand than we are able to meet with our current providers.** At our Oahu location, 40% of those on our waitlist are QUEST members. At our Maui location, 66% are QUEST members. We closed our Big Island and Kauai insurance-based services, despite ongoing community need, due to losses based on unsustainable rates in 2018. These waitlists are only representative of our organization and are similar across providers.



WE LOVE WHAT WE DO

The increased rates approved in last year's legislative session were published by Med-QUEST for use beginning 01/01/2025 but then required each provider work with the managed care organization (MCO) administering the QUEST benefit to members to work out these new rates within their provider contracts. At this point, we have not yet been able to contact the increased rates and therefore have not been able to adjust pay rates for staff and increase our hiring.

We respectfully request the Committee pass this bill in support of maintaining increased rates for what we believe are under-covered behavioral health services.

Mahalo,

Kristen Koba-Burdt, BCBA, LBA, CDP  
BAYADA Behavioral Health



Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Monday, February 10, 2025  
1:20 pm  
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE  
Conference Room 225  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street

## **SUPPORT SB450 RELATING TO AUTISM**

**Honorable Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee,**

On behalf of the Hawai'i Association for Behavior Analysis (HABA), we sincerely thank you for your leadership in passing the recent increase in Medicaid rates for applied behavior analysis (ABA) services. After nearly a decade of stagnant rates, 2025 finally brings an increase—but the funds that were passed were nonrecurring so they are only for 2025. We urge you to pass this bill to maintain the increased rates and prevent disruptions in services for families who depend on them.

ABA is a **medically necessary** service covered under QUEST for individuals under 21 with an autism diagnosis, as mandated by federal law (EPSDT, Social Security Act §1905(r)). It is the gold standard for improving independence, reducing the need for long-term support, and improving the quality of life. .

As noted in the recent ABA rate study ([DC233](#)), providers continue to face **workforce shortages** due to low reimbursement rates, leading to **long waitlists** and limited access to services, particularly on neighbor islands. Some providers have even **stopped accepting QUEST** due to unsustainable rates. Without competitive reimbursement, families will continue to struggle to access the services their children desperately need.

The Legislature took an **important first step** by increasing rates last session, but these were just made available on 01/01/2025 and many providers are still working on their updated contracts with the QUEST health plans therefore not yet able to bill the increased rates. However, we know that without **maintaining these adjustments**, providers will not be able to offer competitive pay and will likely lose staff, resulting in families facing uncertainty about their children's care or being unable to access care at all. Investing in ABA services now ensures



children receive early intervention, reducing long-term costs and allowing them to **reach their full potential**.

In an effort to improve the accuracy of the preamble, we offer the following recommendation because indirect time is not separately billable:

Furthermore, the legislature finds that modeled rates for individual one-to-one services increased significantly for all scenarios. However, modeled rates for group services decreased for the lowest and medium rate scenarios. ~~Part of the decrease stemmed from the fact that indirect time has become separately billable since the med-QUEST division rates were set and was thus not included in the rate. Another reason was that g~~Group rates were decreased to reflect the number of members served simultaneously, rather than allowing the same rate to be charged concurrently for each client, which is the med-QUEST division's existing guideline.

We urge you to **pass SB450** to secure a **sustainable future** for ABA services in Hawai'i. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Mahalo,**  
Marija Čolić, PhD, BCBA, LBA  
Legislative Chair  
Hawai'i Association for Behavior Analysis  
[Legislation@hawaiiaba.org](mailto:Legislation@hawaiiaba.org)



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:08:58 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
catherine wilson	Testifying for ABA Positive Support Services	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care by giving agencies the resources they need to hire and keep providers on staff.*

*Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

*Sincerely,*

*Catherine Wilson, M. Ed., BCBA, LBA*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:34:28 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alex Samson	Testifying for Maui Behavioral Therapy	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. ABA is a significantly in-need service for the autistic community in Hawaii. With limited resources, we are often unable to accommodate the need within our communities. Duties within our scope of practice often exceed authorized hours and require working outside our contracted hours. These increased rates would assist us in compensation for our services rendered inside and outside of session.*

*Thank you for your time,*

*Alex Samson*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:24:23 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Boehmert	Testifying for Vitality ABA LLC	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 1:05:29 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kevin Abella	Testifying for 'Imi Ola Support Services	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

As a provider on the Big Island serving the Puna area, we have struggled with the prior below market QUEST reimbursement rates for ABA. We would like to thank this Committee for their support of passing legislation in 2024 to increase these rates, however, this was nonrecurring and it is vitally important we pass additional legislation to maintain these rates beyond 2025. Without this, we will continue to struggle to hire and retain staff and serve the children and families who need our services.

The Senate  
Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

February 6, 2025

RE: In Support of SB 450 *Submitted online via the Hawaii State Legislature website*

Esteemed Chair Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

I write today on behalf of The Council of Autism Service Providers (CASP) in support of SB 450. CASP is a non-profit trade association of autism service provider organizations that have demonstrated commitment to promoting and delivering evidence-based practices for individuals with autism. CASP represents the autism provider community to the nation at large, including government, payers, and the general public. CASP provides information, education, and promotes the generally accepted standards of care for applied behavior analysis, ABA.

Of particular interest to our members is the coverage of evidence-based care in both private health insurance plans as well as through Medicaid. Timely access to medically necessary treatment, including applied behavior analysis, is critical for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).<sup>1</sup>

The State of Hawaii took an important step in 2015, when it passed legislation requiring coverage of medically necessary care for ASD. Since then, individuals diagnosed with ASD have had access to meaningful interventions, reducing their need for special education services, improving their quality of life, and opening doors for further education and employment. CASP deeply appreciates the temporary rate increases established during the thirty-second legislative session in 2024.

This coverage includes children under the age of 21 who are enrolled in MedQUEST, assuring access to medically necessary care pursuant to Medicaid's Early Periodic, Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment

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<sup>1</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics has long recognized that immediate intervention is critical in the treatment of autism. Pediatrics, Vol. 120, No.5, Management of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2007), p. 1163. 46\_dmhc\_regs.pdf

(EPSDT) mandate and CMS' Informational Bulletin on Clarification of Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism.<sup>2</sup> EPSDT requires that these services be provided without delay. The previously referenced CMS bulletin states:

*EPSDT also requires medically necessary diagnostic and treatment services. When a screening examination indicates the need for further evaluation of a child's health, the child should be appropriately referred for diagnosis and treatment without delay. Ultimately, the goal of EPSDT is to assure that children get the health care they need, when they need it – the right care to the right child at the right time in the right setting.*

*The role of states is to make sure all covered services are available as well as to assure that families of enrolled children, including children with ASD, are aware of and have access to a broad range of services to meet the individual child's needs.*

Ensuring an adequate network is established by offering appropriate rates is critical. The existing MedQUEST rates were increased temporarily to reflect the increased cost of providing services. This has caused our member organizations to maintain wait lists for children who are in dire need of services and is in direct contradiction to the requirements of EPSDT.

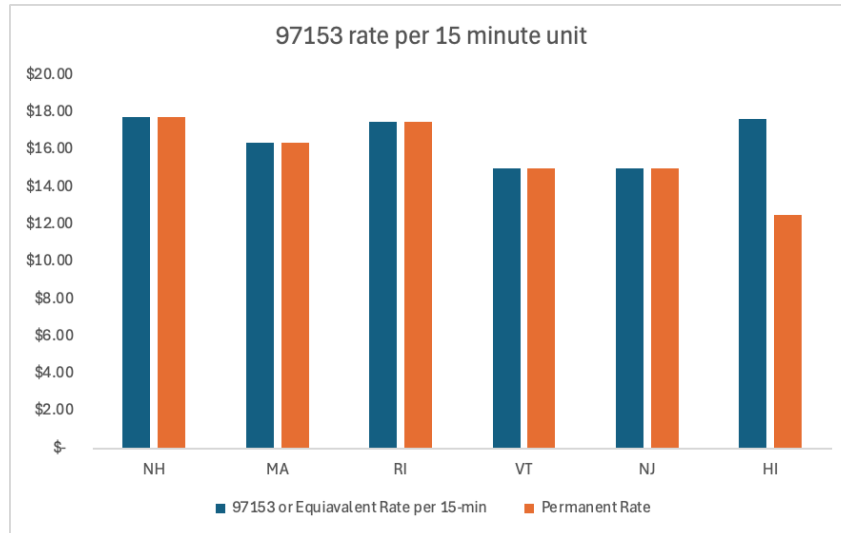
As indicated below, other states with similar costs of living have permanent rates (orange) more in line with economic forces. Further, recent CMS guidance from SHO 24-0005 was consistent with these concerns:

*“Although adequate provider rates are not, in and of themselves, enough to ensure a sufficient network, without them, any steps a state might take to improve the provider workforce likely will be less effective.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services. Informational Bulletin, Clarification of Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism, July 7, 2014 (hereinafter “CMS Informational Bulletin”), available at <http://www.medicaid.gov/Federal-Policy-Guidance/Downloads/CIB-07-07-14.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/sho24005.pdf>



According to the most recent estimates from the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in every 36 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.<sup>4</sup> This means that more than 2.78% of Hawaii’s children on Medicaid have an autism spectrum disorder and many are unable to access the most basic, evidence-based treatments for their diagnosis.

On behalf of CASP and our member organizations serving individuals with autism in Hawaii, we ask that you pass SB450, which appropriates funds to make the temporary reimbursement rates for ABA service providers permanent. Thank you for your efforts to ensure all MedQUEST beneficiaries, including children with autism, have access to life-changing, evidence-based care.

Respectfully,



Mariel C. Fernandez, M.S., BCBA, LBA (TX)  
 Vice President of Government Affairs  
 The Council of Autism Service Providers  
[mfernandez@casproviders.org](mailto:mfernandez@casproviders.org)  
 334-332-2504

<sup>4</sup> AMA Current Procedural Terminology, CPT 2022 Professional Edition, pg. 815 “97155: Adaptive behavioral treatment with protocol modification, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional, which may include simultaneous direction of technician, face to face with one patient, each 15 minutes.”

1516 Corley Mill Road | Lexington, SC 29072



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:45:22 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tori Sims	Testifying for Ho'omau Autism Services LLC	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I support passing SB450 to ensure that access to medically necessary care for individuals with Autism can be of the highest quality. Hawaii is currently in a shortage of providers for the field of ABA. Our small, local agency that serves the west side of Oahu makes a huge impact in the local families of Oahu's lives. This can continue to be done well with the passing of SB450.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 8:48:27 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
FRED K YUEN	Testifying for Behavioral and Therapeutic Services of Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Fred Yuen and I am a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and owner/director of Behavioral and Therapeutic Services of Hawai'i. I am writing in strong support of SB450, which seeks to increase Med-QUEST reimbursement rates for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services.

As a provider, I see firsthand the positive impact of ABA therapy on individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. However, the current Med-QUEST reimbursement rates make it extremely challenging to maintain a high-quality ABA program. These rates make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified behavior technicians, leading to high turnover and impacting the consistency of care and safety for our clients.

SB450's proposed increase is crucial. It will allow us to offer competitive wages and benefits, attracting and retaining the skilled professionals necessary to provide effective ABA therapy. Currently the state of providers that are recruited are those that may stay for no longer than 1-2 years. This high turnover rate puts a huge stress on the industry. Higher rates will allow this industry to higher providers that will stay for career durations.

Investing in ABA therapy through appropriate reimbursement rates is an investment in the future of these individuals, leading to improved outcomes and reducing the need for more costly interventions down the line.

I urge the committee to support SB450. It is essential for ensuring access to quality ABA services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 5:49:47 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Graham	Testifying for Golden Rule ABA	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

I support SB450 because increasing ABA reimbursement rates is essential to ensuring children receive timely, medically necessary care. I have witnessed firsthand the difference between children who receive services early versus those who are forced to wait until they are older and stronger. Those who develop aggressive or self-injurious behaviors while waiting for services are often at the highest risk of requiring long-term care in a facility because providers cannot afford to put staff at risk of injury. Many of the preteens and teenagers I have worked with, who exhibit high-intensity behaviors, may have never developed these challenges had they and their families received ABA support earlier. The current provider shortage creates a dangerous care gap, leaving families without help and forcing providers to turn away those who need services the most. Maintaining increased reimbursement rates is critical to addressing this crisis, supporting providers, and ensuring children receive care when they need it most. Please pass this bill to protect both families and the workforce.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:25:26 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paige Young	Testifying for Hawaii Association for Behavior Analysis	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 11:52:43 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shanda Gustafson	Testifying for Balanced ABA Inc	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

On behalf of myself, my team, my business I iurge you to ensure this significant and critical reimbursement rate remains permanant. Our community continues to be impacted by a dire shortage of RBTs and BCBAs. Without the necessary increase our community will continue have a lack of persons who are able to work in this field. The lack is directly correlated with a wage below livable means, That lack then creates an ever growing delay in care for those impacted most; increased staff burnout and turnover and furtheif impacted services.

There is an opportunity now to create lasting change and a positive terjectory.

Sincerely,

Shanda Gustafson

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:19:50 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Walters	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*
- *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:26:19 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tayler Gorgas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*
- *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:26:40 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sierra Rainwater	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. The lack of increased rates over the last decade has greatly impacted the ability to serve the early intervention population as the rates for DOE reimbursement continue to rise. RBTs will often choose to work in a DOE setting to earn a higher range, however, early intervention is a critical part of autism care that has continued to be underfunded. It is impossible for clinics with 50%+ patients under medicare insurance to compete with DOE rates paying 40+ dollars.*

*Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:38:14 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Josliene Miller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:44:06 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carla T Schmidt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:46:48 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Miller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

News of the increased QUEST rates for ABA service provides hope for so many organizations in pursuit of serving our families with ABA services delivered by competent and consistent providers. With the increased rates, we can offer higher pay and invest in training to enhance the services being provided. I am in strong support of this to make these rate changes permanent which will allow providers to continue to serve our keiki. Thank you.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:50:44 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sho Araiba	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB450 because this benefits people with disabilities receiving better care.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:58:00 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cindy Skocytec	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:34:21 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Lipinski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA. Improved rates will address the provider shortage and help more children access medically necessary care.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:04:53 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kiana Rodriguez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:52:27 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leia Reynolds	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care, which will not only impact the client and their family, but the community overall*
- *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage, so that we can continue to work in this field and increase the amount of care and support we can provide to those impacted by autism.*



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 1:36:02 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kylie Teramoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 2:15:37 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenifer Olin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support increasing rates for ABA services to ensure more individuals can access the medically necessary care they deserve. I urge you to pass this bill to maintain enhanced rates for ABA services, which will help address the growing provider shortage and ensure that families continue to receive the quality care they need.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 9:05:05 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Harris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

I am writing to express my **strong support** for SB450, which seeks to appropriate funds to increase funding for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services for individuals with autism in Hawaii. This legislation is crucial to ensuring that all individuals with autism, particularly those in underserved areas, receive the services they need to thrive.

As a concerned citizen, parent of a child with autism and advocate for individuals with autism, I have witnessed firsthand the **severe shortage of trained professionals** on the outer islands. Many families on Maui, Molokai, Lanai, and the Big Island struggle to access ABA services due to a **lack of available therapists**. Even when services are available, waitlists are long, and the quality of care is often compromised by high caseloads and limited resources.

Additionally, therapists who do practice in Hawaii often **leave the islands due to the unsustainable cost of living**. The drastic rise in housing costs, food prices, and other basic necessities makes it incredibly difficult for ABA professionals to remain in Hawaii, particularly on islands like Maui, where rent and utilities have skyrocketed. Without adequate funding and incentives, we will continue to lose critical service providers to the mainland, further exacerbating the accessibility crisis for autism services.

The passing of this bill will not only **increase funding for essential ABA services** but will also ensure that the Department of Human Services secures **maximum federal matching funds and pursues all possible funding sources**. This step is essential to building a sustainable and equitable system where individuals with autism, regardless of where they live in Hawaii, can receive the care they need.

I urge the committee to support this bill and recognize the **urgent need for increased funding** for ABA services. Ensuring access to these life-changing interventions is not only the right thing to do—it is a necessity for the well-being of Hawaii's children and families.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Megan Harris

Island of Maui



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:35:22 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DeAndrea Sylva	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB450, which seeks to maintain the increased Med-QUEST reimbursement rates for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) providers in Hawaii. These rates, which have remained unchanged since 2015, are essential for ensuring that children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) continue to have access to vital services that support their development and well-being.

As you know, the cost of living in Hawaii has steadily increased over the years, and healthcare providers, especially those offering ABA therapy, have faced growing financial challenges. Without adjustments to the reimbursement rates, many providers struggle to keep up with inflation, rising operational costs, and the increasing demand for services. This not only affects the providers but also directly impacts the children and families who rely on ABA therapy for crucial intervention.

ABA therapy has proven to be one of the most effective treatments for children with autism, helping them develop essential skills that can lead to greater independence and improved quality of life. However, if reimbursement rates do not reflect the current economic conditions, providers may be forced to reduce services, cut staff, or even close their doors, leaving families without access to these life-changing interventions.

SB450 is a critical step in ensuring that children with autism can continue to access high-quality care and that providers can sustain the vital services they offer. By supporting this bill, you are helping to ensure that Hawaii remains a place where all children, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the opportunity to thrive.

I respectfully urge you to support SB450 and help protect access to essential ABA services for children across Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

DeAndrea Sylva M.A., BCBA, LBA



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 11:16:50 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Allison Schurtz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access QUALITY medically necessary services.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 10:14:07 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheyenne F Chavez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

1. *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*
2. *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 7:34:09 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zaya Manubag	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children have access to medically necessary care and medically necessary hours available to them.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 7:15:20 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shauna Paul	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:32:06 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Frascatore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support funding for special needs resources.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:04:24 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meghan Angell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Testimony in Support of SB450 – Maintain ABA Med-QUEST Reimbursement Rates

I am writing to express my strong support for SB450, which seeks to maintain the increased ABA Med-QUEST reimbursement rates. While the recent rate adjustment has been a critical step forward, it is essential to extend these rates beyond this year to ensure continued access to care for children and families in need.

Prior to this adjustment, ABA reimbursement rates had remained stagnant since 2015. As a result, provider shortages and long waitlists became a significant barrier to care, leaving many families without essential services. Without a commitment to sustaining these higher rates, we risk losing providers once again, exacerbating access issues and negatively impacting the children who rely on ABA therapy for their development and well-being.

Maintaining these reimbursement rates is not just about provider sustainability it is about ensuring that families have timely access to the care they need. I urge you to support SB450 to prevent further service gaps and to uphold the progress that has been made in addressing this critical issue.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Meghan Angell

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 6:42:28 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Belding	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As mother, educator, and ABA provider in Hawaii since 2009, I urge you to support SB450. It is critical to maintain the increased Med-QUEST ABA reimbursement rates for providers to maintain medically necessary services children and families in Hawaii.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Jackie Belding, LBA

Lawai, Hawaii

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 6:16:29 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stanley Bloom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.

Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:21:27 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anastasia Keller-Collins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*
- *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 4:40:08 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexandra Berry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*
- *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 9:10:06 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Valerie Clack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more keiki access medically necessary care.

Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage here in Hawaii.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 11:48:31 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LELAND HIGA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.

Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA services and address the provider shortage.

Mahalo,

Leland Higa

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:33:43 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Letesha Driskell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 10:31:27 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lindsey Shepherd	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for SB450, which seeks to maintain the increased Med-QUEST Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) reimbursement rates for providers. These rates have remained unchanged since 2015, despite the increasing cost of living, making it increasingly difficult for providers to sustain high-quality care for children who depend on these essential services.

ABA therapy plays a critical role in supporting children with autism and other developmental disabilities, helping them gain crucial life skills and independence. However, without adequate reimbursement, providers face financial strain that could lead to service limitations, reduced availability, and even clinic closures. This would create significant barriers for families who already struggle to access timely and consistent care for their children.

Maintaining the increased reimbursement rates is not just a financial issue—it is a commitment to ensuring that children receive the services they need to thrive. I urge you to support SB450 and help sustain access to these life-changing therapies for the families who depend on them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Lindsey Shepherd, LBA, Clinical Director  
Autism Services Kauai  
808-246-4808

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 11:56:58 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peggy Karwiel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a business owner and practitioner and on behalf of my company and the clients we serve, I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.

## Written Testimony

### Committee on Human Services

Monday, February 10, 2025 / 1:20 pm  
Conference Room 225, Hawai'i State Capitol

By

Christine K. Walton, PhD, BCBA-D, LBA  
President, Behavior Analysis No Ka Oi, Inc.

SB450– Appropriates funds to increase the funding for applied behavioral analysis services for persons with autism.

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair, Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting SB450, which seeks appropriate funding for the Med-Quest Division to address non-covered or under-covered behavioral health services for Med-Quest beneficiaries.

I am the President of Behavior Analysis No Ka Oi, Inc., a Kaka'ako-based clinic that has been providing services to individuals with autism for over 15 years. Our clinic specializes in applied behavior analysis (ABA), an empirically validated, medically necessary treatment for children diagnosed with autism and related disorders. While the passing of Luke's Law in 2015 was a significant milestone, requiring health insurance coverage for autism diagnosis and treatment, the Medicaid fee schedule for ABA services has remained unchanged.

Over the past decade, operational costs have risen significantly. Expenses related to rent, employee health insurance and benefits, and mileage reimbursements for employees commuting to homes and community sites have all increased. Despite these rising costs, the lack of increases to the Medicaid fee schedule has severely impacted our ability to recruit and retain qualified providers.

We cannot offer competitive wages compared to school-based services, which are reimbursed at higher rates. This has led to challenges in hiring the best providers and retaining experienced staff. Many of our qualified professionals have relocated to the mainland, where the cost of living is lower, and fee schedules are more favorable, or leave the field completely. As a result, our clinic now has a waitlist of approximately three years for services. While the passage of Luke's Law was a monumental advancement in securing services for the people of Hawai'i, it is not impactful if those it was meant to serve cannot find providers.

In conclusion, additional funding for the Med-Quest Division is essential to address the gap in non-covered or under-covered behavioral health services. This funding will ensure that medically necessary ABA services are accessible to individuals with autism in Hawai'i and help clinics like ours recruit and retain qualified providers to meet the growing demand for services.



**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:42:59 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Torres	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 8:43:01 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Tse	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:22:01 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deborah Ho'ohuli-McKinney	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB450, which seeks to increase reimbursement rates for ABA services under Med-QUEST. Ensuring sustainable rates is essential for more children to access the medically necessary care they need.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:27:29 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janell Kaneshiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services so that more children can access the life changing services that help them live a more independent and happy life. There is such a shortage of providers because of the rates not supporting a higher salary. Our company loses so many employees because they need to make more money to survive especially living here in Hawaii with the cost of living being so high.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:33:57 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
McKenna Conner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:35:08 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Bolgren	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

I support bill SB450 to maintain the increased Med-Quest rates for ABA services. This will help ensure retention of RBTs and allow the clients to maintain consistency in programming. Consistency will ultimately help aide in their success.

Thank you,

Amanda Bolgren, LBA

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 11:04:00 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angela Broff	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good afternoon,

I am writing as a small business owner that provided applied behavior analysis (ABA) services through medical insurance in the state of Hawaii. I have been an ABA provider for over 28 years and an agency owner since 2015.

I am writing to express my support for the proposed bill concerning continued rate increases for ABA services. Ensuring these increases are vital to maintaining a consistent workforce of trained and licensed ABA professionals. Confirmation of ongoing support would enable agencies like mine to update budgets accordingly and pass these increases on to service professionals.

Additionally, I respectfully request that you review the rates for social skills groups. The significant decrease in these rates during the last budget review has made them unsustainable. These groups are unique in that they require a HIPAA-compliant rental space and a more substantial amount of time for preparation and data compilation (codes 97154, 97157, and 97158). Maintaining a sustainable rate for social skills groups is crucial for developing effective fade and discharge plans from more intensive ABA services, ultimately ensuring the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Angela Broff

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 12:59:09 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa Urquidi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- *I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*
- *Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*



**LATE**

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 1:21:29 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shayna Perkins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care. Please pass this bill to maintain improved rates for ABA and address the provider shortage.*

**LATE**

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:48:02 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Chin-Lenn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support increased rates for ABA services to help more children access medically necessary care.*

**LATE**

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:55:22 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Lau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Extending the funding required for ABA treatment to be provided to the autistic people that would benefit in Hawai'i will ensure our community is supported appropriately.

Mahalo!

**LATE**

**SB-450**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 11:06:59 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/10/2025 1:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am in support of SB450.

As an individual who works in the behaviroal health industry and a family member of someone who receives behavioral health serviecs, I believe that the services are key to the positive outcomes for those who are disagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, I see the need for an increased reimbursement amount. As you know we have a shortage of staffin in all industries. This increase will help individauls keep their services and prevent workers from working in other industries.

We need as many reasons to keep the providers as possible and revenue remembursement is only one of them.

I wholeheartley support an increase in reimburesement amounts.

Resepectfully,

Cheryl Lum