



The Autism Center


MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN



Autism Omnibus Bill



Ch.226 of the Acts of 2014, *An Act Relative to Assisting Individuals with Autism and other Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities*, addresses the following recommendations of the Massachusetts Autism Commission:

- **Require MassHealth to cover medically necessary treatments for children with ASD who are under 21 years old – including ABA therapies as well as dedicated and non-dedicated AAC devices.** This is an important equity and legal issue, ensuring that families who are low-income can access treatments that are now available to families covered by private insurance plans subject to the state’s autism insurance law (ARICA).
- **Change eligibility criteria for The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to include adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Prader-Willi, and Smith-Magenis syndrome.** Many individuals with autism do not have an IQ lower than 70 (currently required for DDS eligibility) but do have significant functioning limitations (self care issues, mobility, unable to live independently, learning issues.) Rather than relying solely on an IQ criteria, DDS would be required to use the federal definition of “developmental disability” to expand eligibility to adults with ASD and PW who meet conditions for “substantial functional limitations”.
- **Create tax-free saving accounts (called “Achieving a Better Life Experience” or ABLE)** to help families cover anticipated disability- related expenses for individuals with autism and other physical and developmental disabilities. The ABLE accounts are similar to the “529 plan” education savings accounts which encourage parents to save money for future college costs and are modeled on a federal bill pending in Congress.
- **Create Autism Endorsement for special education teachers**, which is a voluntary credential for special education teachers to gain in-depth knowledge about the complexities of educating students with ASD. This will help to ensure that the growing number of students with autism receive appropriate educational services by increasing the capacity of school districts to meet their complex and unique needs.
- **Require Department of Mental Health and Department of Developmental Services to develop and implement a plan to provide services to individuals who have both a mental illness and a developmental disabilities**
- **Establish the Autism Commission as a permanent entity** responsible for overseeing the implementation of the original Commission’s recommendation and monitoring the implementation of government policies impacting individuals with ASD, with an executive director and 34 commission members who will investigate and report on the range of services and supports necessary for individuals with ASD to achieve full potential across their life spans.

(c) Autism Center of Massachusetts Advocates for Children 8/06/14

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