

Minnesota Senate
Health & Human Services
Chair: Sen. Wiklund
February 16, 2023

Re: Supporting the Freedom to Choose and opt out of MCOs SF 404

Dear Madam Chair & Members, many thanks for the opportunity to testify today in support of SF 404.

My name is Idil Abdull. I am a Somali Autism Mom, an advocate, and a provider. I usually never advocate from a provider's perspective, but I chose to do it today at least from a provider of color. As you may have heard, autism is high in Somali children born in Minnesota. Please see the below research and articles. I also want to draw your attention to the fact that Minnesota has one of the worst health racial disparities in the country. See below links and articles about this as well.

My son was diagnosed with autism at age 3 and ½ years old which is considered early and good by most standards. I took him to an autism therapy clinic. To make a long story short that included lawsuits and becoming an advocate, I decided instead of always complaining about my son not getting the services he needed; I would become an advocate and a provider.

So, at the age of 90, I went back to school and got a master's degree in autism therapy, particularly applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy. I partnered with my attorney and started a small ABA clinic. Our goal was and still is to serve autism families particularly Somali children as well as other black and brown autistic kids.

In parallel, as an advocate, I, and other Somali autism parents (Hodan & Istahil) and our community fought long and hard to ensure the state of Minnesota covered autism therapy for children with Medicaid. Please see below articles, especially the Mpls Tribune one titled – **double standard**. MCOs were denying medically necessary treatments to children with autism.

With the help of Abeler, **Gottwalt**, Hann, Pogemiller, Berglin, Sheran, Liebling, Gov Dayton, and so many others, we were able to pass what later became early intensive developmental and behavior intervention (EIDBI). This ensured MCOs covered the same services as Fee for Service. We thought our fight was over and we prevailed. **We were mistaken. The MCO insurance is the million dollar phone that does not ring.**

There are dozens of autism therapy clinics including mine who are no longer able to serve MCO autistic children. Why not, you ask. When we serve a client with fee for service, DHS has straight and simple guidelines and policies to follow. They train us on how to do the treatment plans, get authorizations, do billing, and provide monthly clinical/policy hours for **providers**. We are able to bill every other Thursday up to 11:59pm and get reimbursed the following Tuesday for services we have provided. There is no drama and no confusion.

When we serve an MCO client who has Ucare or BCBS, there is no provider training, no billing training, and we have no idea when and if we are going to get reimbursed for the therapy we provided. It can take weeks to months and sometimes never. There is no support nor guidance from MCOs. For providers of color, the MCOs are at best rude towards us and at worst bias and racist. To be fair, this attitude does not apply to county based plans. We have never had an issue with them. Jamal Omar can attest to this with facts, data and documents.

I even contacted Kathryn Kmit who directed me to connect with Mr. Andreson and Mr. Lucas Nesse whom I knew when he was the LA for Sen. Senjem. I am sorry to report neither of them cared about their members or their contracted providers. They refused to help. I then contacted CMS Chicago and Baltimore offices and told them what the MN Medicaid agency was doing with MCOs will only increase the racial disparity we have in Minnesota. CMS told me that they asked the state Medicaid agency to ensure the training for MCO contracted providers was the

same as that of FFS. Sadly, it is not. I then contacted the person at DHS who does the MCO contracts, Pamela who informed me MCOs will now have **one** recorded training for autism therapy providers. That simply is not enough. As a result, our clinic and many others have made the painful and heartbreaking decision of not being able to serve MCO autism children.

Think about that for a minute. This will now increase racial disparity. It will increase the support and resources these children will need later in life because they are not getting early intervention.

In summary, madam chair and members, the ball is in your corner. Even though there is the saying insurance companies have more money than God. You have the power, the responsibility, and quite frankly the obligation to ensure low-income Medicaid patients have the freedom and the opportunity to choose their health care. I hope you do the right thing and vote for this bill.

People's lives and health care depend on you and your vote.

Referencing articles and research:

[Mpls Tribune - Double Standard](#)

[Autism Rates higher in U.S Born Somali Children in Mpls](#)

[UofMN study funded by CDC, NIH and Autism Speaks confirms - autism IS higher in Somali kids born in Minnesota](#)

[Minnesota Racial Health Disparities](#)

[Autism family with MCO wins a lawsuit](#)

<https://www.startribune.com/autistic-maple-grove-boy-wins-battle-for-treatment-coverage/127978098/>

Sincerely,
Idil Abdull – Somali Autism Mom & Advocate