

January 29, 2024

**To the Members of the Human Services Committee
Minnesota State Legislature**

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Anisa Hagi-Mohamed and I am a Bloomington resident and a mother of three children on the autism spectrum. As a neurodivergent parent myself, and an African immigrant raising my family in this state, I feel compelled to share my perspective on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and advocate for its continued improvement, not its abolishment. My testimony is rooted in personal experience, social justice, and the recognition of the diverse realities faced by families like mine across Minnesota.

ABA has been a critical tool in helping my children navigate their unique challenges while empowering our family to support them meaningfully. Through the guidance of a licensed psychologist and a team of professionals with varying levels of expertise—from Level 1 to Level 3 providers—my children have made remarkable progress. ABA has equipped them with essential communication skills, self-regulation strategies, and greater independence, significantly improving their quality of life and our family dynamic.

Parent education, a cornerstone of ABA, has been invaluable in helping me understand and support my children's unique needs. Additionally, the culturally responsive providers we've worked with, including professionals from the East African community, have bridged the gap between clinical approaches and our family's cultural context. This cultural alignment has been essential for my children's success, but I know this level of responsiveness is not yet available to all families in Minnesota. Expanding access to culturally competent providers is an area where continued improvement is needed.

It is troubling when individuals claim to speak for the entire autism community while presenting a singular, often biased perspective. As a Black mother raising Black autistic children, I cannot relate to or support the notion that ABA is universally harmful. The risks my children face are compounded by systemic racism. When my autistic child stims in public, the stakes are not just misunderstandings—they are risks to his safety. My child may be seen as a threat, not someone deserving of care or compassion. This stark reality underscores the importance of ABA as a tool for equipping children with skills that enhance their safety, independence, and ability to thrive in a world that often marginalizes Black children with disabilities.

The conversation about ABA must include the diverse experiences of families like mine, avoiding narratives that reflect only the realities of privileged communities. Instead of abolishing ABA or shutting down autism centers, efforts should focus on improving the system to ensure it meets the needs of all families. ABA is not perfect, but it has immense potential to empower families and improve outcomes. We need to refine and enhance its ethical standards, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility, not discard a therapy that has proven life-changing for so many.

DHS's role in improving ABA and autism services is critical. Licensing, while important, should serve as a tool for supporting and strengthening autism centers, not as a barrier to their operations. Shutting down centers or creating punitive restrictions will only harm families who depend on these services, particularly in marginalized communities. Licensing must be a collaborative process that ensures accountability, quality care, and adequate resources for providers, so they can continue supporting families like mine.

The success I've seen in my family gives me confidence in ABA's value, and I want more families to benefit from this support—not less. Rather than dismantling ABA or imposing measures that limit access to services, we should work together to build a system that prioritizes high-quality, culturally responsive care for all Minnesota families.

Thank you for considering my testimony. As a mother, advocate, and member of the East African immigrant community, I hope my perspective underscores the importance of supporting and improving ABA services for all families in Minnesota.

Sincerely,
Anisa Hagi-Mohamed

Parent, Autism Advocate