

## Testimony of Maangaar Voices

### Advocating for Immigrant Families and Culturally Responsive EIDBI Services

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

On behalf of Maangaar Voices, we submit this testimony to express our deep concerns about the future of Early Intensive Developmental and Behavioral Intervention (EIDBI) services, particularly for immigrant families who rely on culturally responsive providers.

Maangaar Voices was founded in 2024, but our work builds on nearly two decades of grassroots advocacy for immigrant families navigating disability services. In 2021, our board member, Dr. Hussein Awjama, coined the term 'Maangaar,' meaning 'Unique Mind,' after discussions with parents, self-advocates, and professionals. This term was created to replace stigmatizing language and shift the conversation toward an asset-based, culturally affirming view of autism.

Our organization focuses on autism and related disabilities within immigrant communities, providing education, advocacy, and culturally relevant resources. We amplify the voices of families who are often overlooked in policy discussions, ensuring that their needs and concerns are represented at every level.

EIDBI services have been life-changing for the families we serve. However, we are deeply troubled by the disproportionate barriers being placed on minority-owned providers. These providers have bridged the gap for families who were historically excluded from care due to language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and systemic biases within larger institutions. Families in our community have endured long waitlists, culturally incompetent care, and dismissive treatment from large providers—experiences that many are still healing from.

Now that immigrant and Black-owned providers have stepped up to fill these gaps, they are facing excessive scrutiny, regulatory barriers, and a lack of access to resources that larger providers continue to receive. There is a strong hyperfocus on minority-owned providers, while well-connected organizations continue to operate with full support from DHS. This is not oversight—it is systemic inequity.

We firmly believe that licensing should not be punitive. If compliance is the goal, all providers—regardless of size or ownership—must be given equal access to resources, training, and support. Instead of setting up barriers that disproportionately impact the providers who serve our communities, DHS should be working to strengthen and support them.

We want to protect and expand EIDBI services while ensuring that families have a seat at the table in shaping how these policies are implemented. Preventing fraud is important, but it should not come at the expense of real families who rely on these services daily. DHS must step up to support the trusted providers that immigrant families turn to every day, ensuring that they grow and thrive, rather than being pushed out due to bureaucratic hurdles.

This is not just an issue of service delivery—it is a social justice issue that demands immediate action. We urge this committee to ensure that immigrant voices are heard, that culturally responsive care is protected, and that all providers receive equitable treatment in the licensing process.

Sincerely,

**Maangaar Voices**

Advocating for Immigrant Families & Disability Equity

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## **Testimony of Samsam Mohamed**

Human Services Representative – Hennepin County | Autism Advocate | Mother of a 5-year-old autistic girl

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Idil Ahmed, and I am the mother of a bright and resilient 5-year-old autistic girl. For the past nine years, I have worked as a Human Services Representative in Hennepin County, supporting families navigating complex systems of care. Despite my professional background, I have found that advocating for my own child in these same systems has been one of the hardest battles I have faced.

EIDBI services have made an incredible difference in my daughter's life. Through culturally competent providers, she has developed communication skills, sensory regulation strategies, and increased independence that allow her to participate in daily life with greater ease. These services are not optional for families like mine—they are essential.

However, I am increasingly alarmed by the disproportionate scrutiny placed on minority-owned EIDBI providers. For years, our families were turned away from large institutions like Fraser and MAC, placed on long waitlists, or met with providers who did not understand our children's needs. Many of us endured frustrating experiences where language barriers, cultural stigmas, and systemic biases prevented our children from receiving the care they deserved. When we finally found providers who understood our experiences and worked with us rather than against us, our children began to thrive.

Now, those same providers are facing excessive regulatory barriers, while larger, well-connected organizations continue to receive DHS support, private meetings, and access to resources that small, community-based providers do not. Licensing should not be used as a tool to punish providers who serve our communities—it should be a process that strengthens them. We need transparency, fairness, and equity in how these regulations are implemented. If our trusted providers are forced to close due to unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, our children will suffer the consequences.

We want EIDBI services to continue, and we want high standards of care. But we also want a seat at the table to ensure that licensing does not become a mechanism for excluding the very providers who have finally given our families the support we have long needed. Preventing fraud is important, but it should not overshadow the real struggles of families who simply want their children to receive the best care possible. DHS must step up to support these providers—not punish them.

This is not just about policy—it is about equity, about fairness, and about ensuring that all families, regardless of race, language, or background, have access to high-quality, culturally competent care.

Sincerely,

**Samsam Mohamed**

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## **Testimony of Amin Jama**

ICU Nurse | Student of DNP in Anesthesiology| Father of a 7-Year-old Autistic Boy

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Amin Jama, and I am the father of a 7-year-old autistic boy. As a nurse and CRNA student, my research focuses on reducing harm for autistic children during medical procedures. However, today I write to you not as a researcher or healthcare provider, but as a father who has fought for years to ensure that his son receives the support he deserves.

Early Intensive Developmental and Behavioral Intervention (EIDBI) services have been invaluable in my son's development. Through these programs, he has gained communication skills, emotional regulation strategies, and the ability to participate in his community. Yet, as I advocate for his continued progress, I fear that the barriers being placed on minority providers could reverse all of the progress we have made.

Our family, like so many others, had negative experiences with larger providers who lacked cultural understanding and did not meet our son where he was. When we finally found a provider who understood our family and respected our background, our son began to thrive. Now, I am terrified that these providers will be shut down, not because they are failing families, but because of systemic obstacles that others do not face.

Licensing should be a tool for strengthening services, not a weapon used to eliminate culturally responsive providers. If these providers are forced out, our children will be placed back on long waitlists, left struggling at home, at school, and in the community. We need DHS to support these providers, to ensure they have the resources to grow and improve—not to punish them for trying to serve communities that have been ignored for far too long.

I urge this committee to prioritize equity in the licensing process. Every provider should have the same access to resources, training, and support. Our children's futures depend on it.

Sincerely,  
**Amin Jama**

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## **Testimony of Abdikareem Hurreh**

Policy Advocate | Autism Advocate | Father of a 15-Year-old Autistic Teenager

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Abdikareem Hurreh, and I am the father of a 15-year-old autistic teenager. I have dedicated my career to policy advocacy, but no policy issue is more personal to me than ensuring that my son, and other children like him, continue to receive the services they need to thrive.

EIDBI services have been critical to my son's progress. He has developed skills that allow him to communicate more effectively, manage transitions, and function with more independence. Without these services, he would not be where he is today. However, I am deeply concerned about the inequities in how EIDBI providers—particularly minority-owned providers—are being treated under new licensing requirements.

For years, Somali and immigrant families have struggled to access appropriate autism services. Large institutions failed us time and time again, and our children suffered because of it. When culturally competent providers finally emerged, they changed everything. They understood our children, respected our language and traditions, and made services accessible to families who had been shut out of the system for too long.

Now, those same providers are facing relentless scrutiny, while larger, predominantly white-owned organizations continue to receive DHS resources, private meetings, and behind-the-scenes support. Licensing, while important, should not be used to disproportionately burden the very providers who are filling gaps in the system. If we lose them, our children will be left without the care they need, and we will return to long waitlists, unmet needs, and increasing struggles at home, in school, and in the community.

This is not just about autism services—it is a social justice issue. I urge you to ensure that all providers, regardless of background, receive equal treatment, equal resources, and equal opportunity to serve our children. Our families deserve better.

Sincerely,  
**Abdikareem Hurreh**

## **Testimony of Fatuma (Mana) Sharif**

Nurse | Social Media Influencer | Autism Advocate | Homeschooling Mom | Mother of Two  
Autistic Boys (Ages 5 and 4)

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Mana Sharif, and I am the mother of two autistic boys, ages 6 and 5. As a nurse, a social media advocate, and a homeschooling parent, I have seen firsthand how crucial EIDBI services are for families like mine. These services have given my children the tools they need to communicate, regulate their emotions, and engage with the world around them.

But I am afraid. I am afraid that the providers who have made such a difference in my children's lives will be forced to shut down because of unfair regulations that target minority-owned organizations. For years, families like mine have struggled to find culturally competent services. We have been dismissed by big providers like Fraser and MAC, where our children were misunderstood and where our needs were not met.

Now, we finally have providers who understand us—who look like us, speak our language, and respect our traditions. Yet instead of being supported, they are being unfairly scrutinized. The licensing process should be about ensuring quality care, not about setting up unnecessary barriers that disproportionately affect immigrant and minority providers.

I urge this committee to take action. We want to protect EIDBI, but we also want to protect the providers who are finally serving our children the way they deserve. Support them, don't punish them. Strengthen them, don't push them out. Because if they disappear, so do our children's chances of receiving the care they need.

Sincerely,  
**Fatuma (Mana) Sharif**

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## **Testimony of Deqo Shire**

### **Mother of a 9-year-old Autistic Girl**

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Deqo Shire, and I am the mother of a 9-year-old autistic girl. For years, my daughter struggled to communicate, regulate her emotions, and feel safe in environments that were overwhelming for her. The world around her didn't understand her. But EIDBI services changed that.

Because of the providers who work with my daughter every day, she has found her voice. She can express her needs, manage transitions, and participate in her community in ways I once thought were impossible. But now, I fear that these providers—the ones who have given my daughter a chance—are at risk of being forced out of the system.

Why is it that minority-owned providers face stricter regulations, greater scrutiny, and more barriers than their larger counterparts? Why is it that when immigrant families finally find services that work for them, those services are suddenly in jeopardy? The families in my community have had overwhelmingly negative experiences with large autism providers, yet those organizations continue to operate freely while the providers who meet us where we are face shutdowns.

We want a seat at the table. We want to be part of the conversation, ensuring that licensing is used to strengthen services, not eliminate them. This is about equity. This is about justice. And most importantly, this is about our children.

Sincerely,  
**Deqo Shire**

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## **Testimony of Zeinab Mohamed**

Minneapolis Public Schools Family Liaison | Autism Advocate | Mother of a 15-year-old autistic teenager

To the Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Zeinab Mohamed, and I am the mother of a 15-year-old autistic teenager. I work as a Family Liaison for Minneapolis Public Schools, where I support families navigating the challenges of raising children with autism. I am also a passionate advocate for ensuring equitable access to autism services, especially for immigrant and minority families.

EIDBI services have played an instrumental role in my son's development. With structured support, he has gained communication and self-regulation skills that allow him to participate more fully at home, in school, and in his community. These services have not only helped my son but have also empowered me as a parent to better support his needs.

However, I am deeply troubled by the heightened scrutiny and additional barriers that minority-owned EIDBI providers are facing. For years, families like mine have struggled to find services that are culturally competent and linguistically accessible. Larger providers often failed to meet our children's unique needs, and many families had painful experiences where they felt unheard, dismissed, or even alienated. It was only when culturally responsive providers emerged that we began to see real progress.

Now, these providers are being subjected to a different standard—facing unnecessary hurdles, additional restrictions, and a level of scrutiny that their larger counterparts do not experience. There is a hyperfocus on minority-owned providers, specifically Somali, that is making it incredibly difficult for them to continue operating, despite the fact that they are the ones truly serving our communities. If they are forced to close their doors, we will return to a system where our children are left waiting for months or even years to receive essential care.

Licensing should be about ensuring quality and accountability, not about creating barriers that disproportionately impact Black, immigrant, and culturally competent providers. I urge this committee to take immediate action to ensure fairness and equity in the licensing process. All providers should have access to the same resources, training, and support—not just those with long-established ties to DHS.

We want to protect EIDBI, but we also want to protect the providers who serve us every day. We need them to grow and expand, not to be forced out due to systemic inequities. This is a social justice issue that demands immediate attention. Our voices are loud, and our needs are clear—support our providers, support our children, and ensure that EIDBI remains accessible for all.

Sincerely,  
**Zeinab Mohamed**