



# House passes autism bill by a vote of 96-1

## Revised version eases ASD coverage caps

**BY DAVID BEARD**

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CHARLESTON — Bills often spark extensive debate on the House floor before they pass or fail, but on Thursday, action on the House autism bill drew repeated offerings of praise and thanks after it passed.

HB 2693 mandates state — PEIA and WVCHIP — and private insurance providers other than the self-insured to provide coverage for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders.

The House Finance Committee had changed the bill last week to add coverage caps, but in response to a lukewarm reception to the caps, Finance Chairman Harry Keith White changed it again to include more liberal caps.

Last week's committee substitute called for an annual \$30,000 limit on applied behavior analysis (ABA) treatment for children ages 3-6 and \$1,000 a month for ages 7-18.

Autism coverage advocates had noted some flaws in that version, including: The state's Birth To Three program doesn't cover ABA, just certain therapies; \$1,000 a month isn't sufficient for children diagnosed at a later age.

The newly amended bill provides a \$30,000 annual limit for ABA for three consecutive years from the date of diagnosis, and \$2,000 a month thereafter until the child turns 18.

The re-amended bill allows for ABA to be delivered by either a certified behavior analyst or a properly trained ABA tutor.

It passed 96-1 with Delegate Ron Walters, R-Kanawha, the lone holdout.

After passage, the bill's lead sponsor, Monongalia Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, said, "It is really exciting that we are where we are today."

She thanked the Judiciary Committee for its years of study of the subject, and White and his committee for finding a way to pay for it.

Delegate Mary Poling, D-Barbour, read a letter of praise from an Elkins High School student named Alyssa Leach. Leach wrote that families without autism coverage can't afford out-of-pocket treatment for their children.

“This is a big mistake that shouldn’t be happening. This bill is a great idea,” she wrote.

Delegate Ralph Rodighiero, D-Logan, said he has a son with autism. He and his wife found a way to pay for treatment and their son, 18, is going to college, working and “will be a productive citizen. With this bill we passed, the other children with autism will have hopes to do the same thing.”

The bill now goes to the Senate.

Judiciary Vice Chairman Mark Hunt, D-Kanawha, said he has pushed this kind of bill for five to six years.

“It’s been a good fight and I hope we can persuade the folks in the Senate to pass the bill,” he said. “I think they’re inclined to do so, and I would ask that all of you help us to make them be a little more inclined to do so.”

The state estimates about 438 kids under PEIA and 312 under WVCHIP will require autism coverage.