

February 6, 2026

To: Senate Finance Chair Krueger  
Assembly Ways & Means Chair Pretlow  
Senate Health Committee Chair Rivera  
Assembly Health Committee Chair Paulin  
Members of the Joint Health Budget Committee

Re: Written Testimony Regarding Governor Hochul's Proposed 2026–2027 Medicaid Budget

Thank you, Senate Finance Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways & Means Chair Pretlow, Senate Health Committee Chair Rivera, Assembly Health Committee Chair Paulin, and members of the Joint Health Budget Committee, for the opportunity to submit written testimony for your consideration as you begin reviewing proposals related to Governor Hochul's Proposed 2026–2027 Medicaid Budget. I appreciate your leadership and willingness to hear directly from individuals, families, and advocates who are deeply impacted by Medicaid-funded services, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my perspective during this critical budget process. I am writing to testify and to advocate against change to Medicaid rate cuts. My name is Elizabeth Perez, and I am the single mother of two beautiful children—my 11-year-old, Isaiah Perez, and my 7-year-old, Lucas Perez—both of whom have autism and mental health disorders. I am here writing to you not just as a parent, but as the voice of two little boys who cannot stand before you and speak and write for themselves.

I want to share our story—not because it is easy, but because it is necessary.

Raising two children with high needs as a single mother means I carry everything—every appointment, every school meeting, every meltdown, every sleepless night, every fear—on my shoulders alone. Before ABA entered our lives, those shoulders were breaking under the weight.

My boys were severely behavioral. Meltdowns lasted hours. Communication felt impossible. Safety was a daily concern. Trips to stores, school transitions, and even simple routines overwhelmed them. And I spent night after night wondering how I, by myself, could give my children the tools they needed to survive in a world that didn't yet understand them.

In 2021, our lives changed forever when my 11-year-old—already vulnerable—was abused at a specialized school. He returned home a different child. Traumatized. Afraid. Unresponsive to traditional supports. The system that was supposed to protect him failed him.

Meanwhile, my 7-year-old's behaviors escalated so drastically that he had to be pulled out of school entirely. His school could not manage him safely; despite the legal protections he was entitled to under IDEA and Section 504. As a mother, being told your child cannot be educated because his needs exceed what the system can handle is devastating.

Both my boys also receive outside mental health counseling, which has been critical for healing their emotional and psychological wounds. But counseling alone cannot teach communication skills, daily routines, coping strategies, or behavior management. It cannot teach a child how to navigate frustration at school or how to follow directions when overstimulated.

That gap—between emotional therapy and daily functioning—is where ABA changed everything.

In New York State, families are offered a variety of services for autistic children—speech therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, special education supports, OPWDD services, and behavioral interventions through schools. These are all valuable, but none of them replace ABA. Each service addresses one part of a child's needs, but ABA addresses *the whole child*.

- Speech therapy helps with communication.
- Occupational therapy helps with sensory and motor needs.
- Counseling helps with emotions and trauma.
- Special education services help with academics.
- OPWDD services help with long-term supports, not day-to-day behavioral teaching
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But ABA is the only therapy that systematically teaches behavior, communication, life skills, coping strategies, and independence all at once, in real time, in real environments.

ABA bridges the gaps that every other service leaves open.

No other service provides:

- One-on-one individualized behavior support throughout the day
- Parent training that teaches ME how to better support my children
- Real-time interventions when behaviors escalate
- Skill-building tailored moment by moment
- Safety protocols that can prevent crises
- Comprehensive treatment planning based on data, not guesswork
- Tools for teachers so they can keep children in class instead of removing them

ABA is the only service that has given my children and me the full support we need to function safely, successfully, and with dignity.

And as a single mother, that difference is life-changing. ABA didn't just help my children—ABA helped me navigate motherhood in a way I never thought possible. It taught me how to respond to behaviors, how to introduce routines, how to teach life skills, and how to understand what my children were trying to communicate—even when they couldn't use words.

ABA gave me a roadmap when I had none.

ABA gave my boys structure.

It gave them communication.

It gave them coping skills.

It gave me hope.

Behaviors that once consumed our lives are now manageable. Tasks that once ended in crisis now end in success. My children can brush their teeth, dress themselves, follow routines, use language more effectively, and participate in school with less fear and more confidence.

Teachers have praised the progress ABA has brought into the classroom. Instead of spending their day trying to de-escalate behaviors, they can now actually teach. ABA collaboration has made school safer, calmer, and more supportive for everyone.

And I want to make something absolutely clear:

ABA is medically necessary.

Not optional.

Not supplemental.

Not replaceable by any other NYS resource.

Medically. Necessary.

Medicaid's EPSDT mandate requires states to provide medically necessary treatments to children under 21—including ABA—because it is essential to their development and ability to function. It is also essential to ensuring access to the FAPE rights guaranteed under IDEA and Section 504.

Cutting ABA is not a financial adjustment.

It is a life-altering decision that will hurt vulnerable children.

Without ABA:

My children's progress will regress.

Their behaviors could return to the severe, crisis-level episodes that once controlled our lives. Schools will be overwhelmed. Teachers cannot fill the role of trained ABA professionals.

Single parents will suffer the most. Many will be forced to leave jobs. Many will face burnout. Many will be alone in moments that require trained intervention, not hope. Emergency systems will see more children in behavioral crisis and children will lose the chance to learn skills that shape the rest of their lives.

We cannot let this happen.

ABA is not a luxury. It is not optional. It is not something families can “make do” without. It is medically necessary. And something medically necessary **requires** protection.

Please protect ABA services.

Protect our children’s right to treatment.

Protect our families.

Protect their futures.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

*Elizabeth M. Perez*

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*Mother and Advocate*

Submitted for the public  
record

