



➤ **FY25 Budget Request**

Increase funding for HESAA's Behavioral Healthcare Provider Loan Redemption Program from \$5 million to \$15 million.

Consider a \$5 million carve out of those funds for behavior analysts to address the long-standing unmet treatment needs of individuals with autism.

➤ **Background**

The Behavioral Healthcare Provider Loan Redemption Program (BHPLRP) is a vital workforce development program that helps combat critical workforce shortages in behavioral healthcare. The program was first introduced through legislation (P.L. 2022, c. 34) signed by Governor Murphy as part of the FY23 budget. As required by the legislation, the FY23 and FY24 budgets included \$5 million, respectively, to support loan redemption for behavioral healthcare providers in areas where critical workforce shortages persist (e.g., board certified behavior analysts, psychiatrists, licensed clinical social workers).

➤ **Program Success**

In FY23, grants were approved on a first-come, first-served basis for eligible providers. With the application open for just a few weeks, the demand outpaced available funding about 10:1, resulting in 50 awards being made across seven behavioral health professions. The FY24 applications are currently under review with HESAA. More than 2,000 individuals applied during the one-month application period in October 2023. We anticipate that approximately 50 awards will be made again this year.

As the state's leading autism advocacy organization, Autism New Jersey is keenly aware of demand for qualified behavioral health professionals to treat individuals with autism and the value of workforce development programs like the BHPLRP. Our 800.4.AUTISM Helpline receives a high volume of calls from families seeking ABA therapy and providers seeking qualified behavior analysts to join their practice. Indeed, national data from the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) shows that demand for board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs) increased 23% - in just one year - between 2021 to 2022 nationally.<sup>1</sup> The same report demonstrates that BCBA job postings increased 47% between 2021 to 2022 in New Jersey alone, making it one of top five states with the highest demand for BCBAs.

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<sup>1</sup> Behavior Analyst Certification Board. (2023). US employment demand for behavior analysts: 2010–2022. Littleton, CO: Author. [https://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Lightcast2023\\_230206-a.pdf](https://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Lightcast2023_230206-a.pdf)

### ➤ **Imminent Considerations**

At the same time, final implementation of New Jersey's ABA licensing requirements, which are based on a law signed by Governor Murphy in 2020, are on the horizon.<sup>2</sup> We anticipate that the State Board of Applied Behavior Analyst Examiners will adopt final regulations later this year.

With licensure implementation imminent, we can expect the demand to increase – as some of those who are currently practicing behavior analysis might not meet licensure eligibility requirements. Thus, the state must build the workforce infrastructure to support the growing demand for autism treatment services, especially in light of New Jersey's ABA licensure requirements. The HESAA's inclusion of BCBAs in the BHPLRP, which should shift to New Jersey Licensed Behavior Analysts (LBAs) once the licensure regulations are adopted, is helping to establish that infrastructure.

### ➤ **Conclusion**

With these realities in mind, the current annual funding of \$5 million for the BHPLRP is not sufficient. Given the overwhelming popularity of the program, the high demand for professionals in behavioral healthcare fields, and the important services provided by behavioral healthcare providers, it would be prudent to increase funding for the program.

These incentive programs are essential to closing workforce gaps and building a robust pipeline of talent to serve the unique behavioral healthcare needs of many New Jerseyans. It also has the added benefit of potentially reducing the State's financial obligation to provide long-term services for adults with autism because early and intensive treatment for individuals with autism substantially changes their prognosis and need for services across the lifespan.

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<sup>2</sup> [P.L. 2019 c. 337](#) - As the state license rolls out, the field will begin referring to behavior analysts as Licensed Behavior Analysts (LBA) rather than Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA).