



To: Honorable Members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee

From: Dr. Suzanne Buchanan, Executive Director

Date: December 19, 2024

Subject: Support for S3753, S3754, S3755, S3756 and Comments on S3750 & S3752

Autism New Jersey is a non-profit organization that informs, engages, and connects families, professionals, and policymakers so New Jerseyans with autism can be safe, healthy, and happy.

We commend the intent of the package of bills meant to safeguard individuals receiving developmental disability services and prevent abuse and neglect within our community. This is a shared priority, and we wholeheartedly support this goal. Thank you to Chairman Vitale for sponsoring this important legislation and posting the bills for consideration and discussion today.

Support for S3753, S3754, S3755, & S3766

The dignity, safety, and health of individuals with autism are Autism New Jersey's utmost priority. We believe four of the bills help to further achieve this goal as written. Autism New Jersey **supports S3753, S3754, S3755, and S3766** and asks you to vote **YES** on each.

Seeking Amendments to S3750 & S3752

While we understand that **S3750 and S3752** are listed for discussion only, we ask that greater consideration be given to each of these bills.

New Jersey has the third-highest rate of autism in the nation. We face an unprecedented demand for providers skilled in meeting the complex needs of individuals with autism and related disabilities. This need is further amplified as more children transition out of the Children's System of Care (CSOC), requiring specialized services for significant behavioral and medical challenges.

Autism New Jersey urges an approach that does not inadvertently stifle the number of qualified providers through regulations that impose prohibitive costs and/or restrict agencies' operational flexibility. We have seen the long-term and negative impact of another department's regulations that, while well-intentioned, have resulted in a stagnation of new providers for our community, and we seek to avoid a similar outcome here.

We support **S3750's** efforts to strengthen quality standards, and below provide our recommendations on how to achieve this in a more proactive and preventative way. Autism New Jersey seeks amendments to Sections 2g (Office of Program Integrity and Accountability Violations and Fines); 2h (internal investigations); and 2j (Quality Management Teams) of the bill.

With respect to **S3752**, Autism New Jersey supports appropriate governance but would like to highlight aspects that could hinder operational efficacy. We seek amendments to Section 2d (Board Meeting Observers); Sections 3 & 4 (administrative cost ratio); Section 6a (notification of investigations); and Section 8 (manager requirement at each site) of the bill.

Autism New Jersey has shared the full proposed amendments with the prime sponsor and staff.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge these bills to focus on health and safety with a more proactive and preventative approach to service delivery so that they bolster a higher quality provider community. New Jersey's IDD sector needs more qualified providers to meet the growing needs of our residents, and we look forward to collaborating with you to ensure the dignity, safety, and health of individuals with autism.

Thank you for considering Autism New Jersey's views on this bill package.