

United States Senate

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JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

July 17, 2013

Dr. Jonathan Woodson
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs
& Director of TRICARE Management Activity
United States Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Dr. Woodson,

I write to you today regarding TRICARE's decision to change the coverage of applied behavior analysis (ABA) for all TRICARE eligible beneficiaries with autism. After hearing from many of my constituents, I believe that this decision will delay and interrupt direct services for thousands of military children, making it harder for families to care for their children. This new policy has the potential to put thousands of military children with developmental disabilities at risk of losing critical behavioral treatment and care.

Last year, I voted for an amendment to the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act that expanded treatment options for children with developmental disabilities, including autism. TRICARE's recent rule change appears to reduce those treatment options by establishing conditions that are difficult for some families to meet, thus reducing the number of children who can continue required treatment.

My understanding is that starting next week, new TRICARE policies require standardized testing every six months, and "measurable progress" must be shown to receive continued ABA care. While I understand the importance of establishing baseline data, data may be used inappropriately and without necessary context. TRICARE's decision to require two assessments, Vineland and ADOS-2, is also unusual. According to providers in my state, these two assessments may be used inappropriately to monitor progress in children.

Military children with autism and other developmental disabilities are particularly susceptible to adverse impacts as a result of being moved around the country and other factors often unique to military families, and such impacts can manifest in regression. As such, the new TRICARE policies around discharging these children could have the real world effect of causing serious disruptions in treatment and outcomes.

Before these new policies are in put into effect, I join other Senators in strongly urging you to consult with experts on developmental disabilities such as autism and ABA treatment practices. I am happy to provide you with contact information for providers in the Commonwealth who are experts in this area.

Many military families who are trying to navigate compliance with these new rules are also having trouble finding providers who are trained to provide the assessments. Families are often told that there is a waiting list over six months long before their child can be assessed, which will likely result in a halt to their current services.

Virginia is home to one of the largest military populations in the country, and many families are asked to deal with multiple challenges in providing a stable home environment due to deployments and frequent moves. By changing the policy for disabled children with autism, there is a risk that critical services will be removed. I have already heard from several families who have had their child's services stopped due to confusion over how to process the authorizations for services.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your prompt response to my inquiries. If there is anything your department needs to assist in this request, please contact Mark Brunner at 202-224-2023 or email at mark_brunner@warner.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator