



# MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Every physician matters, each patient counts.*

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.242/S.149 AN ACT TO ENHANCE STANDARDS OF CARE FOR THOSE WITH AUTISM AND INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

**September 9, 2025**

**The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) wishes to be recorded in support of H.242/S.149, *An Act to Enhance Standards of Care for Those with Autism and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.**

The MMS is a professional association of over 23,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to provide them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. The MMS policy supports exploring innovative care and payment models to improve the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in the medical home by trained pediatric teams when clinically appropriate. H.242/S.149 represents an important step toward enhancing the quality, accessibility, and equity of care for individuals with ASD and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). By establishing an advisory committee to strengthen professional education, improve standards of care, and promote equitable, evidence-based services, this legislation lays a foundation for consistent statewide standards in diagnosis, treatment, and clinical training.

ASD affects approximately one in 36 eight-year-old children in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Early diagnosis and intervention have been shown to significantly improve long-term developmental, behavioral, academic, and employment outcomes. Unfortunately, many Massachusetts families face significant barriers to timely and equitable diagnosis. Across the Commonwealth, wait times for diagnostic evaluations often range from six months to over a year, delaying access to early intervention services that can make a critical difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Maenner MJ, Warren Z, Williams AR, Amoakohene E, Bakian AV, Bilder DA, Durkin MS, Fitzgerald RT, Furnier SM, Hughes MM, Ladd-Acosta CM, McArthur D, Pas ET, Salinas A, Vehorn A, Williams S, Esler A, Grzybowski A, Hall-Lande J, Nguyen RHN, Pierce K, Zahorodny W, Hudson A, Hallas L, Mancilla KC, Patrick M, Shenouda J, Sidwell K, DiRienzo M, Gutierrez J, Spivey MH, Lopez M, Pettygrove S, Schwenk YD, Washington A, Shaw KA. Prevalence and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years - Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2020. *MMWR Surveill Summ.* 2023 Mar 24;72(2):1-14. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36952288/>

These delays are compounded by persistent disparities in diagnosis. African American, Hispanic, non-English-speaking, and immigrant children are, on average, diagnosed later than their white peers<sup>2</sup>. In addition, gender bias may obscure early recognition in girls, who often present differently from boys with ASD.<sup>3</sup>

The Autism Omnibus Act ensures that ASD diagnoses are made by qualified professionals, but the Commonwealth continues to face serious workforce shortages within pediatric subspecialties and child psychiatry. To meet growing demand, primary care pediatric teams must be equipped and supported to play a larger role in screening and diagnosing ASD within the medical home—an approach already being piloted successfully in several Massachusetts academic medical centers.<sup>4</sup> When pediatric clinicians have a longitudinal relationship with families and receive targeted training, they can reliably diagnose autism spectrum disorder, particularly when symptoms emerge early in life.<sup>5</sup> This continuity of care fosters trust, reduces stigma, and allows for more immediate access to intervention services.

However, significant reimbursement and workflow barriers prevent many trained primary care practices from integrating autism evaluations and complex care coordination into routine practice. These services require multiple extended visits, administrative follow-up, and interprofessional collaboration—activities that are typically undercompensated or uncompensated under current payment models. To ensure that this legislation leads to real improvements in access, we recommend adding language directing the development of equitable and sustainable payment models that support primary care–based ASD evaluation and management.

By establishing a multidisciplinary advisory committee and statewide standards for training and care, H.242/S.149 will help ensure that every patient with autism or an intellectual or developmental disability—regardless of race, gender, language, or socioeconomic status—receives high-quality, compassionate, and timely care. The bill’s emphasis on education, cross-agency coordination, and the inclusion of diverse organizational representation is an important stride toward equity and excellence in our health care system.

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<sup>2</sup> Hyman SL, Levy SE, Myers SM. Identification, Evaluation, and Management of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Pediatrics*. 2020;145(1). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-3447>

<sup>3</sup> Brickhill R, Atherton G, Piovesan A, Cross L. Autism, thy name is man: Exploring implicit and explicit gender bias in autism perceptions. *PLoS One*. 2023 Aug 23;18(8):e0284013. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0284013. PMID: 37611041; PMCID: PMC10446214. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10446214/>

<sup>4</sup> UMass Chan Medical School. Early Childhood Autism Diagnosis Project. <https://www.umassmed.edu/psychiatry/clinicalservices/child-adolescent-clinical-services/early-childhood-autism-diagnosis-project/>

<sup>5</sup> Paul H. Lipkin, Michelle M. Macias, COUNCIL ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, SECTION ON DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL PEDIATRICS; Promoting Optimal Development: Identifying Infants and Young Children With Developmental Disorders Through Developmental Surveillance and Screening. *Pediatrics* January 2020; 145 (1): e20193449. 10.1542/peds.2019-3449. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/145/1/e20193449/36971/Promoting-Optimal-Development-Identifying-Infants>

We urge the committee to report H.242/S.149 favorably and to consider incorporating provisions addressing sustainable reimbursement and implementation strategies to make these goals achievable in every corner of the Commonwealth. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.