SB257

On behalf of the Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorder, we are writing to express our strong opposition to Bill 257, which proposes significant changes to the existing framework for assessing and providing services to individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). While the bill may be presented as a means to improve efficiency and reduce costs, we believe it undermines the quality of care and outcomes for individuals with ASD and their families.

Existing law mandates that the Aging and Disability Services Division of the Department of Health and Human Services establish a statewide standard for measuring outcomes and assessing individuals with autism through the age of 21. This framework is built upon best practices and requires the use of standardized assessment instruments that include direct observation by qualified professionals. These requirements are essential for ensuring accurate diagnoses and effective interventions tailored to the unique needs of individuals with ASD.

Section 3 of Bill 257 proposes to eliminate the requirement for a specific protocol and standardized assessment instruments, replacing them with a more generalized approach that allows any healthcare provider to conduct assessments. This change raises serious concerns about the consistency and reliability of diagnoses. Without standardized protocols, there is a risk that assessments may vary widely in quality, leading to misdiagnoses or inadequate support for individuals who need specialized care.

The potential consequences of misdiagnosis are particularly alarming. Children who are misdiagnosed may not receive the appropriate interventions and support they require, which can lead to significant setbacks in their development. Early intervention is critical for children with autism, as it can greatly influence their ability to learn, communicate, and socialize. A misdiagnosis can result in missed opportunities for effective therapies and services, leaving children and their families to navigate unnecessary challenges and disappointments. The emotional and developmental toll on these children can be profound, affecting their self-esteem, social skills, and overall quality of life.

Furthermore, the proposed changes in the bill to allow any healthcare provider to conduct assessments and develop treatment plans, without the oversight of licensed professionals, could lead to a dilution of the quality of care. This lack of oversight may result in treatments that are not evidence-based or tailored to the specific needs of individuals with ASD, further jeopardizing their development and well-being.

In conclusion, we believe that Bill 257 poses a significant risk to the quality of care for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. We urge you to reconsider the implications of this legislation and to prioritize the needs of individuals with ASD and their families by maintaining the existing standards that ensure accurate assessments and effective interventions. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.