

An Act to Ensure Full and Equal Access to Services from the Department of Mental Health for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Related Conditions who Meet the Eligibility Criteria For DMH Services

House docket number **HD01658**
Senate docket number **SD00781**

Lead sponsors

Representative Kay Khan, House Chair of the Joint Committee for Children, Families and Disabilities;
Senator Jennifer Flanagan, member of the Autism Commission.

This bill addresses one of the two most urgent recommendations of the MA Autism Commission.

Goal This bill would establish that people with autism can receive DMH services if they meet the eligibility criteria: that is, they have a serious co-occurring mental health diagnosis. DMH practice currently excludes people with autism from receiving mental health services, a discriminatory approach that denies vital treatment and support to the small proportion of our population with critical needs. In the rare cases in which autistic people have received DMH services (because of a later autism diagnosis, a court order or multiple hospitalizations), we have seen that relatively minimal support can make the difference between dependence and self-sufficiency. [A potential friendly amendment to this bill might broaden it to cover any other diagnoses that DMH routinely excludes, if we can establish that need.]

Background The Massachusetts Special Commission Relative to Autism, chaired by former Rep. Barbara L'Italien, has been meeting since December 2010. The Commission was charged with identifying gaps in services for autistic people and facilitating their participation in society to the fullest extent of their ability and desire.

AANE role The Autism Commission includes two members of the Board of Directors of the Asperger's Association of New England (AANE), and its Executive Director. Based on the Commission's draft recommendations (soon to be published), the AANE has identified two legislative priorities and established an Advocacy Committee to promote them.

Our constituency This bill is supported by a large state-wide constituency. The AANE database includes 20,000 people, including folks with Asperger Syndrome or a related condition, and their families, clinicians and other allies. The overwhelming majority live in Massachusetts. This bill has the endorsement of the Cross Disability Advocacy Coalition and is likely to be endorsed by other statewide disability organizations.

Contact

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