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## **AN ACT TO PROVIDE EQUAL ACCESS TO EVALUATIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Tom Sannicandro and Sen. Barbara L'Italien

H.129, S.87

### **Testimony of Dr. Michael A. Goldberg, Director of Professional Affairs**

**July 14, 2015**

I am Dr. Michael Goldberg, Ph.D. a Licensed Psychologist and a Past-President of the Massachusetts Psychological Association. I submit this testimony in my capacity as the Director of Professional Affairs for the Massachusetts Psychological Association. Our organization urges you to move favorable on H.129, S.87, An Act to Provide Equal Access to Evaluations for Children with Disabilities. This consumer legislation is needed to protect the vulnerable children and families who have been unable to obtain independent neuropsychological and psychological evaluations necessary for children's individualized educational programs that are mandated by state and federal law.

On June 30, 2015 the Attorney General's Office issued its report on Health Care Cost Trends and Cost Drivers. That report concluded that "historically low behavioral health rates" impact consumers' ability to access services. We ask that you take action to adjust the state mandated rates for neuropsychological and psychological assessment services provided as independent educational evaluations so that we may ensure that disabled children have access to critical educational services. Students are generally not able to access important services until a psychological assessment has been made to justify specific special services. Because of the historically low behavioral health rates, these assessments are often unavailable to children in need.

When I was first licensed as a psychologist in the Commonwealth in 1993, child psychologists such as myself routinely provided independent educational evaluations for disabled children. However, reimbursement for those services has not been adjusted in many years to reflect the level of training, expertise and costs related to providing those services. The current reimbursement rate set by the state for doctoral level psychologists to providing

these evaluations is less than I pay a handyman with a high school diploma to hang shelves in my home. While I appreciate the effort and skill of my handyman, the cost of his training and his tools pales in comparison to the costs of the training and instruments that psychologists use when conducting these evaluations. Likewise, his hammer lasts for decades in comparison to neuropsychological tests that must be updated every few years at significant costs to the psychologist. The result is that in 2015 very few of our members are able to provide these services. This means that many low-income and middle income parents cannot obtain the evaluation that state and federal education laws mandate.

This bill would require a review of rates for independent educational evaluations every three years. While this bill will not directly fix the significant difficulty that low and middle income families experience accessing these critical evaluations for their children, it will be a modest and significant step forward. On behalf of the more than 1600 members of the Massachusetts Psychological Association we urge you to move favorably on this critical bill to protect vulnerable children.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael A. Goldberg, Ph.D.".

Michael A. Goldberg, Ph.D.  
Licensed Psychologist  
Director of Professional Affairs