

First I want to thank each of you for taking the time to read our family's testimony on autism.

#### Maverick's Journey:

Maverick was born January 25, 2011 a healthy, beautiful baby boy. Maverick has been from the very start, unusually pleasant as babies go. We were all on cloud nine at home, kids and all. Maverick is the youngest of eight children, and is probably the one thing the whole family agrees on. We couldn't love him more.

Maverick was developing perfectly and exceeding his milestones up until about a year or so. Then everything changed. I believe it was March of last year that I began searching the web daily trying to find what was "wrong". During this time and probably before he was one, I had fleeting thoughts of the fact that he wasn't saying much. I became a little obsessed trying to reassure myself that everything I was reading was true, that he was just a late talker. We became more concerned after his first birthday because he had lost the few words he could say. Then one evening after work, my husband walked into the house with the answer. He found an article that described our little man to a T. My baby is Autistic? We had no idea what that meant, although our lives are now consumed with it. We had no awareness at all and Maverick didn't match a couple of the signs, he had them all. So then the work began, I called nonstop for weeks trying to get some help with no luck. He had to be diagnosed first. I had no idea the amount of tests, and evaluations, and questions, and visits that entailed. I laugh when people tell me that autism is overdiagnosed, I don't know how because it took us eight long months. Precious time wasted.

So here we are now, Maverick received his diagnosis January of this year and it has still been a battle. With much perseverance and many breaks, we have finally found him some help. I realize that children birth to three receive services through the school districts, but do you realize that for Maverick that is thirty minutes every two weeks? One hour a month is not going to accomplish much, if anything. However, we were making the most of that hour. We have exhausted ourselves trying to become educated as quickly as possible as each day is precious teaching time. We are committed to doing our part with him at home, and we are making huge changes with our family so that we can help our son be the best Maverick he can be.

Up until recently, all the people that have worked with Maverick have had no training with autism, only developmentally delayed children. We are blessed that our son is very smart, he doesn't have any delays in his cognitive or motor development. However, our son is in the one and three percent with language and social development for his age. That is heartbreaking to hear. We are so excited because we found a wonderful woman who has agreed to provide us with some ABA training while working with Maverick also. I am so thankful and blessed that we are on the State Health Plan, as I had no idea that these services would not be covered otherwise. My heart breaks for the families who don't have the option and can't imagine what I would do if we didn't. To know that there is something available to help your child and yet you can't get access to it, would be an awful burden to carry as a parent. If my child has an ear infection, we get him an antibiotic. Maverick needs help that we can provide, and as his mother I will do everything I can to get him what he needs. Would you not do the same for your child?

Maverick begins his ABA therapy this Friday. I pray every day that after we fought so hard to get it authorized by the insurance company, that it won't be taken away. We can't afford to pay 100% out of pocket. Early intervention is what will make a difference to these children and they deserve no less than everything to get them to live a life of independence as adults.

On a side note, I am an independent insurance agent and I love my job. I know that any of my customers, if educated, would agree with the decision to cover autism services. However, the majority of people don't know, and people can't always understand what they haven't experienced. You have been given the facts, the statistics, the information needed to make an informed decision. A decision that I believe would be unanimous with the public, if they had the facts that have been provided to you.

I don't know what I should say or could say, to make you understand the importance of immediate action this year. This decision isn't going to make or break the system either way. However, a year is a long time in a family's life. It is a long time to wait for your child to look you in the eye again or to recognize his siblings. Please consider the pain and desperation we are feeling watching our precious boy fading. I can't tell you enough the impact your decision will have on so many children and their families. Please don't take this window of hope away and please allow more families the opportunity to help their child. I pray your minds and hearts are open to the impact your decision makes.

Thank you again for your time,

Brandi Shaffer  
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