



MISSISSIPPI  
**AUTISM**  
**ADVISORY**  
COMMITTEE

***2024 REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE***

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Dear Legislators,

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee (MAAC) respectfully submits this year's report to the Mississippi Legislature, detailing our findings and recommendations for the 2025 legislative session. In this report, we are highlighting disparities in the adult autistic community in our state.

After committee discussions and concerns from families around the state, the Intellectual Disabilities/Developmental Disabilities Waiver (ID/DD) waiting list was identified as a pressing issue. Our committee believes that Mississippi needs to have a separate Autism Spectrum Disorder adult waiver for the autistic community in our state.

This recommendation is not new for MAAC. It was first addressed in 2012, when the incidence rate of autism was 1:88. Today, the autism incidence is 1:36<sup>1</sup>, and thus creating a separate waiver makes good public policy for this growing and aging autistic population in our state. Autistic adults in need of long-term services and support spend years on waiting lists before receiving such services through Medicaid. The published data suggest that the majority waiting have unmet needs for functional skills services, employment or vocation services, and mental and behavioral health services.

The second recommendation is for increased Medicaid rates for the following psychiatric codes: 90791, 96130, and 96131. It was found, through our committee discussions that many of these suspected undiagnosed autistic adults cannot be properly referred to service agencies for support without the proper DSM-5 Autism diagnosis. In Mississippi, a provider access issue is preventing suspected autistic adults from seeking formal diagnoses since not all listed Medicaid providers are accepting new patients. Increasing the aforementioned rates can incentivized mental healthcare providers to accept new patients.

By continuing to build upon the previous successes of autism policies in our state, these recommendations will enable to strengthen and improve the transition experience for autistic individuals and their families. The goal is to provide support while fostering independence for these individuals who will gain access to the community through autism services provided by state agencies.

On behalf of autistic people, their families, and providers who work with them, the Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee stands ready to assist in the implementation of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kristie Speights

Chairperson

Lynda Balfour

Vice-Chair

Kristi Herrin

Vice-Chair

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# Annual Report

## Our Beginning

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee (MAAC) was created by House Bill 1125 (2011 Regular Session) as the Legislature recognized an urgent need for strategies on how to best identify, treat, educate, accommodate, and employ people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and assist their families.

## Our Mission

The mission of MAAC's is "to study, to make recommendations, and to develop a strategic plan on how best to educate and train students with ASD to maximize their potential productivity within the workforce, and to develop an annual plan" outlining these strategies. MAAC is tasked with writing a report to the legislature outlining any roadblocks to creating meaningful progress in the areas of mental health, education, medical, and employment for people with ASD and their families.

The MAAC met four times this year. Based on these meetings and discussions received, the committee has chosen to continue the focus on the following strategic recommendations set forth from the 2023 annual report.

## Committee Recommendations

The 2024 MAAC has approved two (2) recommendations to present to the Mississippi Legislature for consideration:

### **Recommendation #1**

The MAAC recommends that legislators establish an Autism Waiver for the adult population designed to provide autism-targeted, long-term, community-based, person-centered, supports and therapeutic services for adults aged 18 years and older. This waiver will enable adults with ASD to participate in their community including having jobs and will enable home and community living as they age as an alternative to institutional care.

### **Rationale for Recommendation #1- Autism Waiver**

At present, there are 11 states with autism waivers. Currently, the Mississippi ASD population is grouped under the ID/DD Waiver; and there are a total of 2,588 individuals of varying disabilities on the planning (waiting) list with an approximately nine year wait. There are roughly 680 people with ASD on this waiver's planning/waiting list that could be removed if an autism waiver was available. This would reduce wait times for all waiver applicants greatly. The ASD population would also be able to receive autism specific services as opposed to general disability ones. The purpose of the ID/DD Waiver is to prevent institutionalization of people with intellectual and

developmental disabilities by providing person-centered in-home services, employment services, residential services, and day programming. Serving people in their homes and communities helps them maintain important relationships and make a meaningful contribution to their communities. However, people with ASD have specialized needs that require specialized services. The committee recommends a waiver that is operated by a State Autism Coordinator and Support Coordinators who have specialized training and experience with the needs of the autistic population. An Autism Waiver would allow the ASD population to receive autism-specific services as opposed to services that are designed to serve a more generalized population.

For fiscal year 2024, the ID/DD waiver program is costing on average \$66,111<sup>2</sup> per participant with 22.73 percent of funding coming from the state budget. Having an Autism Waiver, with supports targeted specifically to this population, would serve people with autism in their communities. This would allow them to be active participants, working, living meaningful lives, and contributing to society.

### **Recommendation #2**

The MAAC recommends that legislators increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for the following psychiatric codes: 90791, 96130, and 96131.

### **Rationale For Recommendation #2 – Medicaid Rate Reimbursement Rate Increase**

A recent study found Medicaid data shows wide differences in mental health care across the country<sup>3</sup>. Mississippi currently ranks 42nd in access to mental health care.

In Mississippi, there is a provider access issue that is preventing suspected autistic adults from seeking formal diagnoses. Mississippi Medicaid's website has mental healthcare providers; however, many are not accepting new clients or the information for providers is not accurate. At the present time, the TK Martin Center in Starkville is the only state academic institution that provides autism evaluation to adults with Medicaid coverage.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) has an autism program coordinator that helps diagnosed autistic adults seek employment during this transition from school to employment. In fiscal year 2024, this program served 868 autistic adults. Many of these undiagnosed adults seeking services had an educational diagnosis of autism throughout their formative school years. The lack of an autism medical diagnosis becomes problematic when these individuals transition from the school system and face the service cliff, which is the loss of school services.

By increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for 90791, 96130, and 96131 will incentivize providers to accept Medicaid clients and create a pathway for undiagnosed autistic adults to receive a formal medical diagnosis.

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<sup>2</sup> Mississippi Department of Mental Health

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10125036/>

### **Mississippi Medicaid rates<sup>4</sup>:**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$132.48

96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$94.48

96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$67.37

### **Neighboring State Comparisons**

#### **Tennessee rates<sup>5</sup>**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$168.84

96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$115.47

96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$84.09

#### **Arkansas rates**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$151.12<sup>6</sup>

96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$81.49<sup>7</sup>

96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$81.49<sup>8</sup>

#### **Georgia rates<sup>9</sup>**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$159.17

96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$212.22

96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$212.22

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<sup>4</sup> <https://medicaid.ms.gov/providers/fee-schedules-and-rates/#>

<sup>5</sup> Mississippi Department of Mental Health

<sup>6</sup> <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/CNSLSERV-fees.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/medical-services/helpful-information-for-providers/proc-codes/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/medical-services/helpful-information-for-providers/proc-codes/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://dch.georgia.gov/search/results?query=90791%20reimbursement%20rate>

### **Louisiana rates<sup>10</sup>**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation MD \$108.39  
90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation APRN/CNS/PA \$75.87  
90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation MEDICAL PSYCHOLOGIST \$86.71  
90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation PSYCHOLOGIST \$86.71  
90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation LCSW \$75.87  
96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour MD \$68.14  
96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour MD \$60.84

### **Alabama<sup>11</sup>**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$106.83  
96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$85.92  
96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$65.45

### **Texas rates<sup>12</sup>**

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$138.46  
96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$88.21  
96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$84.52

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.lamedicaid.com/Provweb1/fee\\_schedules/SBH\\_Fee.htm](https://www.lamedicaid.com/Provweb1/fee_schedules/SBH_Fee.htm)

<sup>11</sup> [https://medicaid.alabama.gov/content/Gated/7.3G\\_Fee\\_Schedules/7.3G\\_Physician\\_Fee\\_Schedule\\_6-9-24.pdf](https://medicaid.alabama.gov/content/Gated/7.3G_Fee_Schedules/7.3G_Physician_Fee_Schedule_6-9-24.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://public.tmhp.com/FeeSchedules/OnlineFeeLookup/FeeScheduleSearch.aspx>

## What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability. Some people on the autism spectrum have a known difference, such as a genetic condition. Other causes are not yet known. Scientists believe there are multiple causes of ASD that act together to change the most common ways people develop. There still is much to learn about these causes and how they impact people on the autism spectrum<sup>13</sup>.

Autism is a complex neurobehavioral disorder characterized by impairment in reciprocal social interaction, impairment in communication, and the presence of repetitive and stereotypic patterns of behaviors, interests, and activities. The onset of symptoms is typically before the age of 3 years. The severity of impairment in the given domains as well as the pattern of impairments varies from individual to individual; that is why diagnosticians refer to a “spectrum” of disability. Impairment in social interaction range from difficulty initiating and maintaining interaction, impaired ability to recognize and experience socially acceptable emotions, and difficulty processing and appreciating the thoughts and feelings of others. Communication deficits range from no useful form of communication to very advanced language abilities, but little ability to use language in a social manner. Repetitive and stereotypic behaviors include perseverative behaviors such as complex rituals, extreme difficulty adapting to change and transition, and unusual movements such as hand flapping, tapping, clapping or whirling (known as Stimming).

The DSM-5-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Text Revision) outlines specific criteria for the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The ASD diagnosis is based on the core symptoms of “persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.”

People on the autism spectrum may behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. There is often nothing about how they look that sets them apart from other people. The abilities of people on the autism spectrum can vary significantly. For example, some may have advanced conversation skills, whereas others may be nonverbal. Some may need a lot of assistance in their daily lives; others can work and live with little to no support.

ASD begins before the age of 3 years and last throughout a person’s life, although symptoms may improve over time. Some children show ASD symptoms within the first 12 months of life. In others, symptoms may not show up until 24 months of age or later. Some gain new skills and meet developmental milestones until around 18 to 24 months of age, and then they stop gaining new skills or lose the skills they once had.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html](https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html)



As children on the autism spectrum become adolescents and young adults, they may have difficulties developing and maintaining friendships, communicating with peers and adults, or understanding what behaviors are expected in school or on the job. They may come to the attention of healthcare providers and other professionals because they also have comorbidities such as anxiety, depression, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, which occur more often in people with ASD than in people without ASD.

**Prevalence of Autism and Related Data:**

- Based on the National Survey of Children’s Health (2019 – 2020), Mississippi prevalence of autism is approximately 13,482 children (ages 3 -17), which makes up 2.3% of our childhood statewide population. <sup>14</sup>

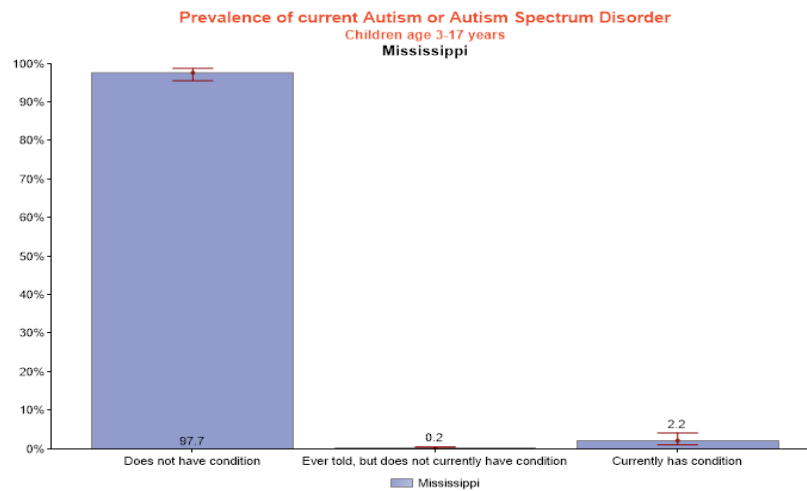
**Chart 1 Spotlight on Mississippi: Prevalence of autism/ASD, age 3-17 years<sup>15</sup>**

	Does not have condition	Ever told, but does not currently have condition	Currently has condition	Total %
%	97.7	0.2	2.2	100.0
C.I.	95.6 - 98.8	0.1 - 0.6	1.1 - 4.2	
Sample Count	903	3	20	
Pop. Est.	605,853	1,179	13,379	
C.I. = 95% Confidence Interval. Please interpret with caution: estimate has a 95% confidence interval width exceeding 20 percentage points or 1.2 times the estimate and may not be reliable.				

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5383&r=26>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5383&r=26>

## Chart 2 Spotlight on Mississippi: Prevalence of autism/ASD, age 3-17 years<sup>16</sup>



- ASD now affects 1 in 36 children.<sup>17</sup>

## Chart 3 Identified Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder ADDM Network 2000-2020<sup>18</sup>

### ADDM Network 2000-2020: Combining data from all sites

Surveillance Year	Birth Year	Number of ADDM Sites Reporting	Combined Prevalence per 1,000 Children (Range Across ADDM Sites)	This is about 1 in X children
2020	2012	11	27.6 (23.1-44.9)	1 in 36
2018	2010	11	23.0 (16.5-38.9)	1 in 44
2016	2008	11	18.5 (18.0-19.1)	1 in 54
2014	2006	11	16.8 (13.1-29.3)	1 in 59
2012	2004	11	14.5 (8.2-24.6)	1 in 69

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5383&r=26>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html#cdc\\_data\\_surveillance\\_section\\_2-identified-prevalence-of-asd](https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html#cdc_data_surveillance_section_2-identified-prevalence-of-asd)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html](https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html)

### Chart 3 Continuation Identified Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder

#### ADDM Network 2000-2020: Combining data from all sites

Surveillance Year	Birth Year	Number of ADDM Sites Reporting	Combined Prevalence per 1,000 Children (Range Across ADDM Sites)	This is about 1 in X children
2010	2002	11	14.7 (5.7-21.9)	1 in 68
2008	2000	14	11.3 (4.8-21.2)	1 in 88
2006	1998	11	9.0 (4.2-12.1)	1 in 110
2004	1996	8	8.0 (4.6-9.8)	1 in 125
2002	1994	14	6.6 (3.3-10.6)	1 in 150
2000	1992	6	6.7 (4.5-9.9)	1 in 150

- ASD is nearly 4 times more common among boys than among girls.<sup>19</sup>
- 4.6 is the average age of autism diagnosis for children 0-17 years old.<sup>20</sup>
- 70% of children with ASD have at least one comorbid developmental or psychiatric condition.<sup>21</sup>
- 1 in 45 adults in the U.S. have autism.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html#cdc\\_data\\_surveillance\\_section\\_2-identified-prevalence-of-asd](https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html#cdc_data_surveillance_section_2-identified-prevalence-of-asd)

<sup>20</sup> <https://nationalautismdatacenter.org/autism-by-the-numbers/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24074734/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9128411/>

## **History of Mississippi Legislative Actions Related to Autism**

The following section contains a non-exhaustive list of recent actions taken by the Mississippi Legislature concerning Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### **2007 – HB 1267 – Caring for Mississippi Individuals with Autism Task Force**

During the 2007 session the Mississippi Legislature passed HB 1267<sup>23</sup> establishing the Caring for Mississippi Individuals with Autism Task Force. This task force submitted their report in December 2007 containing recommendations related to work force training, medical treatment, early intervention, educational practices, and infrastructure changes.

### **2011 – HB 1125 – Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee**

The MAAC was created in the 2011 regular session as the Legislature recognized an urgent need for strategies on how to best identify, treat, educate, accommodate and employ people with ASD and assist their families.<sup>24</sup>

### **2014 – HB 542 - State and School Employees Health Insurance Management Board Task Force**

HB 542<sup>25</sup> requires the State and School Employees Health Insurance Management board to review and study “whether to expand coverage currently provided for the treatment of autism spectrum disorders under the State and School Employees Health Insurance Plan.”

### **2015 – HB 885 – Autism Insurance Coverage Requirement**

During the 2015 session of the Mississippi Legislature, House Bill 885<sup>26</sup> was passed and signed into law by the Governor. This bill requires most health insurance policies to cover screening, diagnosis, and treatment of ASD up to age 8 and also to provide the regulatory framework for the licensure and regulation of the practice of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), a profession providing empirically based treatment beneficial to people diagnosed with ASD.

### **2016 – 2020 No Legislative Actions**

### **2021 – SB 2799 – Medicaid Reimbursement Rates Freeze**

In accordance with the Mississippi Code Section 43-13-117 (D), as amended by the Senate Bill 2799<sup>27</sup> during the 2021 Legislative Session, the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (DOM) will

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<sup>23</sup> <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2007/pdf/HB/1200-1299/HB1267SG.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2011/pdf/HB/1100-1199/HB1125SG.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2014/pdf/HB/0500-0599/HB0542SG.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2015/pdf/HB/0800-0899/HB0885SG.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://medicaid.ms.gov/Medicaid-reimbursement-rate-freeze-to-take-effect-July-1-2021/>

freeze all Provider reimbursement rates at the levels in effect on July 1 of this year. The rate freeze will remain in effect until the Legislature authorizes rates adjustments.<sup>28</sup>

### **2022 – HB 657- Delete Freeze on Medicaid Reimbursement Rates**

To delete the provision that prohibits The Division of Medicaid's Rates of Reimbursement, Services, Charges and Fees from being increased, decreased or otherwise changed unless they are authorized by an amendment to this section by the legislature. House Bill 657<sup>29</sup> was signed by Governor Tate Reeves on April 18, 2022.

### **Recent Autism Related Medicaid Reform Efforts:**

#### **2019 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid Amendment to State Plan Autism Spectrum Disorder**

State Plan Amendment (SPA) 19-001<sup>30</sup> Targeted Case Management (TCM) for Beneficiaries with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in Community-Based Settings, with a proposed effective date of January 1, 2019, has been approved by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services. The SPA includes the following changes:

- Adding Autism Spectrum Disorder as a covered diagnosis
- Removing the needs-based criteria
- Revising the qualifications and training requirements for Targeted Case Managers

#### **2018 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waiver Renewal**

In 2018 the Mississippi Division of Medicaid revised their home and community-based waiver program. This program furnishes an array of home and community-based services that assist Medicaid beneficiaries to live in the community including access to in-home supports, community respite, job discovery, transition assistance day services, and shared supported living.

#### **2018- SB 2095 Authored by Tollison, Parks, Gollot, and Blackwell**

In 2018, during regular session, SB 2095 was referred to Insurance; Appropriations on January 4, 2018, for review and vote. This Senate Bill 2095 was an act to amend section. 83-9-26, Mississippi Code of 1972, to remove the age limitation on the requirement that health insurance policies provide coverage for Autism Related treatment. This SB2085 died in committee on January 30, 2018.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://legiscan.com/MS/bill/HB657/2022>

<sup>29</sup> <https://legiscan.com/MS/bill/HB657/2022>

<sup>30</sup> <https://medicaid.ms.gov/spa-19-0001-targeted-case-management-tcm-for-beneficiaries-with-intellectual-and-or-developmental-disabilities-idd-in-community-based-settings/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/2018/pdf/history/SB/SB2095.xml>

*\*Through a Grass Roots Movement, “Lift the Cap” sponsored by parents and families of autistic individuals, and with the support of Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann and Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney, three Mississippi insurance companies voluntarily agreed to lift the age limit cap on coverage of ABA therapy for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. “Although the state’s three biggest insurers (MS Blue Cross Blue Shield, Magnolia Health, and UnitedHealth) have all agreed to lift the cap, the cap technically remains in place, as part of the state legislation code. Lifting it statewide, and requiring all insurers to comply will likely require legislation.”<sup>32</sup>*

### **2023- Mississippi Division of Medicaid increased ASD rates**

In April 2023, Drew Snyder, Director of the Mississippi Division of Medicaid announced an increase of the reimbursement rates for the therapy codes specific to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The rate increase came after meeting with the chair and co-chairs from the MAAC (Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee) in March 2022, from months of deliberation by Lt. Governor Hosemann and Senator Blackwell, along with compelling testimonies from MAAC committee members and family members in the Medicaid Committee Hearing held December 1, 2022.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://mississippitoday.org/2018/01/16/lives-changed-after-insurers-lift-cap-on-autism-services/>

## Mississippi Autism Related Insurance Report

**Chart 4** Provides an overview of the Community Mental Health Service Medicaid fee schedule that is used to properly identify and diagnosis adults with Autism.

Code	Short Description	PA Required	Min Age	Max Age	Begin Date	End Date	Max Units	Fee
90791	Psych diagnostic Evaluation	No	0	999	07/01/2020	12/31/9999	1	\$132.48
96130	Psycl test eval phys/qhp 1 <sup>st</sup>	No	0	999	07/01/2020	12/31/9999	1	\$94.48
96131	Psycl test eval phys/qhp each	No	0	999	07/01/2020	12/31/2299	7	\$67.37

**Chart 5** Provides a census of Autistic individuals currently being serviced on the Mississippi ID/DD waiver program.

### ID/DD Waiver Autistic recipients by age provided by Mississippi Division of Medicaid

Age	Number Served
10-20 years old	68
21-35 years old	343
36-45 years old	138
46-55 years old	53
56-75 years old	28

**Chart 6** Provides a representation of individuals in Mississippi with a diagnosis of Autism that are currently on the **WAITLIST** to receive services from the ID/DD Waiver. These individuals can wait in an excess of ten years before receiving benefits of the ID/DD Waiver.

### ID/DD Waiver WAITLIST for Autistic individuals by age provided by the Mississippi Division of Medicaid

Age	Number on Waitlist
1-10	68
11-20	186
21-30	234
31-40	101
41-50	33
51-60	28
60+	30

**Statement of Need for Autism Waiver:**

As the staggering wait list numbers suggest, the families served by MAAC continuously report the extreme worry and concerns for their aging child with autism (while the parents/caregivers are also aging). Without a specific waiver that addresses the needs of the aging, autistic population, parents/caregivers are often required to step out of the workforce to care for their aging child/young adult with the diagnosis of autism. The cost of raising a child with Autism is significantly more expensive than raising a child without a neurodevelopmental disability. Additionally, the economic loss increases when the parent/caregiver has to remove themselves from work to meet their child's/young adult's needs. This coupled alongside the autistic individual who is unable to work adds an economic impact for Mississippi that will result in billions of dollars of loss over time (see previous MAAC reports).



## APPENDIX A

### Key Findings on ASD Services Provided by Mississippi State Agencies

The following section provides key findings on the services provided by major state agencies in Mississippi that work with and provide services to our increasing population of people with ASD and their families.

#### Mississippi Department of Education Report

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) identified 7,308 children, ages 3-21 with the educational disability ruling of Autism as of 7/3/2024. (See Chart 7.)

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education (OSE) is committed to providing supports to students with autism, their families, and educators. Through our partnership with REACH MS (through the Mississippi State Personnel Development Grant), professional learning is available to support the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for all students, including students with autism. Additionally, in collaboration with MDE Office of Professional Development, the MDE OSE offers professional learning to educational professionals regarding IDEA eligibility, specially designed instruction, and transition support for students with disabilities.

The MDE OSE also values and upholds that a student's success hinges on parental engagement and collaboration between the family, school, and the community. The MDE OSE provides in person conference supports to families through the Annual Parent Conference, Regional Family Engagement Summits, and the MDE OSE's Annual Time is Right Conference. Additionally, the MDE OSE has several resources on their website for families which include the Compass to College (transitional supports), All Things Assessment (high stakes assessment explanations and supports), and Family Guides to Special Education (supports for each of the 13 eligibility categories and one specifically for supporting students who meet the criteria for a significant cognitive disability). Please visit our website at [www.mdek12.org/ose](http://www.mdek12.org/ose) or contact us at 601-359-3498.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Data provided via MDE Office of Public Reporting

## Chart 7: 2023-2024 Autism Counts

<b>2023-2024 AUTISM COUNTS BY DISTRICTS<sup>34</sup></b>			
<b>SOURCE:MSIS</b>			
DISTRICT	D-NAME	DISABILITY	COUNT
125	INSTANT IMPACT GLOBAL PREP	AUTISM	<10
130	NATCHEZ-ADAMS SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	41
200	ALCORN SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	55
220	CORINTH SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	34
300	AMITE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	11
400	ATTALA CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	13
420	KOSCIUSKO SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	40
500	BENTON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	19
614	CLEVELAND SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	47
617	NORTH BOLIVAR CONS SCH	AUTISM	<10
618	WEST BOLIVAR CONS SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	13
700	CALHOUN CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	23
800	CARROLL COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	14
911	CHICKASAW COUNTY SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	31
921	OKOLONA SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
1000	CHOCTAW CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	15
1100	CLAIBORNE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
1211	ENTERPRISE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	17
1212	QUITMAN SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	20
1321	WEST POINT CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	53
1400	COAHOMA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	13
1420	CLARKSDALE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	20
1425	CLARKSDALE COLLEGIATE	AUTISM	10
1500	COPIAH CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	25
1600	COVINGTON CO SCHOOLS	AUTISM	38
1700	DESOTO CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	766
1800	FORREST COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	36
1802	FORREST COUNTY AG HIGH SCHOOL	AUTISM	13
1820	HATTIESBURG PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	66
1821	PETAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	135
1900	FRANKLIN CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	16
2000	GEORGE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	55
2100	GREENE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	31

<sup>34</sup> Data provided via MDE Office of Public Reporting

### Chart 7: Continuation of Autism Counts by Mississippi District

2220	GRENADA SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	154
2300	HANCOCK CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	93
2320	BAY ST LOUIS WAVELAND SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	33
2400	HARRISON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	254
2420	BILOXI PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	144
2421	GULFPORT SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	131
2422	LONG BEACH SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	66
2423	PASS CHRISTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	32
2500	HINDS CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	57
2505	JOEL E. SMILOW COLLEGIATE	AUTISM	<10
2515	REIMAGINE PREP	AUTISM	<10
2520	JACKSON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	212
2521	CLINTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	59
2525	MIDTOWN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL	AUTISM	<10
2535	SMILOW PREP	AUTISM	<10
2545	AMBITION PREPARATORY	AUTISM	<10
2555	REVIVE	AUTISM	<10
2611	HOLMES CONSOLIDATE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	16
2700	HUMPHREYS CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
2900	ITAWAMBA CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	47
3000	JACKSON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	138
3020	MOSS POINT SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	26
3021	OCEAN SPRINGS SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	123
3022	PASCAGOULA GAUTIER SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	81
3111	EAST JASPER CONSOLIDATED SCH DIST	AUTISM	<10
3112	WEST JASPER CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS	AUTISM	16
3200	JEFFERSON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	19
3300	JEFFERSON DAVIS CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	16
3400	JONES CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	133
3420	LAUREL SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	44
3500	KEMPER CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	16
3600	LAFAYETTE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	50
3620	OXFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	83
3700	LAMAR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	230
3800	LAUDERDALE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	118
3820	MERIDIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	88
3900	LAWRENCE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	29
4000	LEAKE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	48
4100	LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	108
4111	NETTLETON SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	15
4120	TUPELO PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	117

**Chart 7: Continuation of Autism Counts by Mississippi District**

4211	GREENWOOD-LEFLORE CONSOLIDATED SD	AUTISM	58
4225	LEFLORE LEGACY ACADEMY	AUTISM	<10
4300	LINCOLN CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	27
4320	BROOKHAVEN SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	31
4400	LOWNDES CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	87
4420	COLUMBUS MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	63
4500	MADISON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	233
4520	CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	52
4600	MARION CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	20
4620	COLUMBIA SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	47
4700	MARSHALL CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	40
4720	HOLLY SPRINGS SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	20
4800	MONROE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	26
4820	ABERDEEN SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	15
4821	AMORY SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	16
4911	WINONA-MONTGOMERY CONSOLIDATED SD	AUTISM	28
5000	NESHOBA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	50
5020	PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	19
5100	NEWTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	13
5130	NEWTON MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	<10
5131	UNION PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	21
5200	NOXUBEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	25
5321	STARKVILLE- OKTIBBEHA CONS SD	AUTISM	69
5411	NORTH PANOLA SCHOOLS	AUTISM	16
5412	SOUTH PANOLA SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	71
5500	PEARL RIVER CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	58
5520	PICAYUNE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	42
5530	POPLARVILLE SEPARATE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	36
5600	PERRY CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	25
5620	RICHTON SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
5711	NORTH PIKE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	31
5712	SOUTH PIKE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	25
5720	MCCOMB SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	24
5800	PONTOTOC CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	62
5820	PONTOTOC CITY SCHOOLS	AUTISM	44
5900	PRENTISS CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	40
5920	BALDWYN SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	16
5921	BOONEVILLE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	12
6000	QUITMAN CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	16
6100	RANKIN CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	292
6120	PEARL PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	137

### Chart 7: Continuation of Autism Counts by Mississippi District

6200	SCOTT CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	68
6220	FOREST MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	18
6312	SOUTH DELTA SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	<10
6400	SIMPSON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	49
6500	SMITH CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	34
6600	STONE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	34
6711	SUNFLOWER CO CONSOLIDATE SCH DIST	AUTISM	40
6811	EAST TALLAHATCHIE CONSOL SCH DIST	AUTISM	11
6812	WEST TALLAHATCHIE SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	<10
6900	TATE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	30
6920	SENATOBIA MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	25
7011	NORTH TIPPAAH SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	24
7012	SOUTH TIPPAAH SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	57
7100	TISHOMINGO CO SP MUN SCH DIST	AUTISM	50
7200	TUNICA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	31
7300	UNION CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	36
7320	NEW ALBANY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	AUTISM	38
7400	WALTHALL CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	14
7500	VICKSBURG WARREN SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	106
7611	HOLLANDALE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
7612	LELAND SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
7613	WESTERN LINE SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	14
7620	GREENVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS	AUTISM	16
7700	WAYNE CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	25
7800	WEBSTER CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	24
7900	WILKINSON CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	<10
8020	LOUISVILLE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	32
8111	COFFEEVILLE SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	11
8113	WATER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT	AUTISM	13
8200	YAZOO CO SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	19
8220	YAZOO CITY MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DIST	AUTISM	21
	Total		7308

## Mississippi Department of Mental Health Report

- The true number of people with ASD in Mississippi being served remains unclear as only one state agency – the Mississippi Department of Education tracts this population and only for children ages three (3) to twenty-one (21), who have the primary educational disability ruling of Autism (AU).
- The Autism Training Initiative began in 2012 and is designed to build capacity in Mississippi to provide evidence-based, lifespan services and support based on the premise that people with autism are included in all settings. Since February 2014, sixty-five (65) Autism Foundations training have been offered throughout the entire state with over 2,750 attendees through June 2021.
- The Department of Mental Health sponsors and partners with the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities and with the Mississippi Statewide Autism Training Initiative holds the ***Creating Your Own Path: Successful Transitions for Persons with Autism*** conference annually. Continuing education credits are provided for many credential professionals, such as teachers, social workers, nursing home administrators, and DMH credentials. The ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) Annual Autism Conference held on September 7 and 8, 2023 featured keynote speakers Anthony Ianni and Jeffrey Mathews and had 146 participants in attendance.

## Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Report

State vocational rehabilitation agencies are one of the most important sources of employment services for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities. The following chart identifies the number of individuals with ASD that the office of Vocational Rehabilitation served from FY 2017 until June 2024:

**Chart 8 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Served FY 2017-June 2024**

FY	Number Served	Funds spent
2017	253	\$526,779
2018	254	\$517,675
2019	400 (as of 4/30/19)	\$1,000,317
2020	604 (as of 6/29/20)	\$1,634,156
2021	628 (as of 6/2/21)	\$2,304,569
2022	635 (as of 5/23/22)	\$3,193,415
2023	707	\$4,326,337
2024	868 (as of 6/18/24)	\$5,995,803

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has a program specialist assigned to Autism whose duties include:

- Providing field staff updated information regarding ASD.
- Coordinating training for field staff on current best practices related to ASD.
- Coordinating services provided for individuals with ASD through private organizations.
- Collaborating with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to assist them in identifying services needed for individuals with ASD to assist them in obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.
- Working closely with the Supported Employment Program Specialist regarding individuals with ASD by participating in Personal Centered Planning (PCP) meetings along with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, client and family.
- Collaborating with VR Counselors to assist them in identifying services needed for individuals with ASD to assist them in obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.
- Providing training to employers in the state on supporting employees with ASD in the workplace as requested.

- Coordinating on-the-job supports for clients with ASD.
- Serve on the Mississippi Autism Training Initiative.
- Provide resources to families of individuals with Autism of all ages to ensure they have knowledge of where to access services.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation recognizes the importance of emphasizing the strengths and contributions that many of the clients with ASD can offer businesses. Individual characteristics such as punctuality, attention to detail, consistency, reliability, or good visual-spatial or mechanical skills can make these individuals more attractive to employers. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors utilize different tools in seeking employment options for clients with ASD; they include but are not limited to:

- Person-Centered Planning (PCP): Where an action plan is developed to provide directions in employment by identifying client desires, dreams and employment goals.
- Customized Employment (CE): Includes discovery, profile portfolio, resume, and negotiation with employers and job placement.
- Vocational Assessment: Purpose of the assessment is to gather employability related information with an individual that will assist that individual in making vocational decisions. The expected outcomes are to help identify and plan for services or activities needed to assist the person in his/her career goals.
- Project SEARCH Mississippi: The Project SEARCH program is a unique, business led, one-year employment preparation program that prepares young people with developmental disabilities for competitive, integrated, employment through total workplace immersion. The program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent-living skills to assist young people with developmental disabilities make a successful transition into adult life. MDRS partners with a school district and a host business to facilitate this program. 312 individuals with disabilities have graduated from Project SEARCH Mississippi since Project SEARCH UMMC launched in August 2018. 210 of those individuals have gained employment. There are 53 graduates currently seeking employment. Mississippi currently has 28 Project SEARCH sites across the state. Over 200 interns will be participating in Project SEARCH beginning in August 2024.

Through its Transition and Youth Career Services program, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation assists qualified individuals with disabilities including those diagnosed with ASD from 14 to 24 years of age make the transition to a successful future. When an individual is in school, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor works cooperatively with the Mississippi Department of Education and local school districts to help plan and implement pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS).



VR Transition and Youth Counselors can begin providing Pre-ETS services to students as early as age 14. Pre-employment Transition Services may include:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Education (PSED) and Training Opportunities
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) sponsors and partners with the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities and with the Mississippi Statewide Autism Training Initiative to hold the: ***Creating Your Own Path: Successful Transitions for Persons with Autism*** conference annually. Continuing education credits are provided for many credentialed professionals, such as teachers, social workers, nursing home administrators, DMH credentials and Certified Rehabilitation Counselors.

- The Eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) Annual Conference featured Raun Kaufman, former CEO of the Autism Treatment Center of America, as the keynote speaker was held on September 8, 2022. A total of 117 participants attended.
- The Ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) Annual Autism Conference featuring keynote speakers Anthony Ianni and Jeffrey Mathews was held on September 7 and 8, 2023. A total of 146 participants were in attendance. This conference was held at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services Madison office.

## **Institutions of Higher Learning Report**

### **Mississippi State University**

Mississippi State University offers a fully online and a fully in-person master's program in Applied Behavior Analysis through the Department of Counseling, Higher Education Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations. In addition, the program offers a graduate certification program and an undergraduate minor in applied behavior analysis.

The program has graduated 62 students and has a currently active roster of 64 students as of the Fall 2024. The Graduate Certificate Program has six active students as of Fall 2024 and the undergraduate minor has graduated 53 students and will have 69 active ABA minors still in progress.

### **University of Mississippi**

University of Mississippi offers a hybrid master's program in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in special education/applied behavior analysis. The program falls under the special education umbrella with a single program of study in ABA holding a verified course sequence through Applied Behavior Analysis International (ABAI).

The program has graduated two cohorts of students thus far with 17 and 10 students, respectively. The third cohort consists of 10 students who will graduate in May of 2025. Fall enrollment is still in progress at the time of this report for the 4<sup>th</sup> cohort with 8 acceptances thus far.

The program is continuing to grow with a second full time faculty member joining in August of 2025.

## **The Mississippi Autism Board Report**

The Mississippi Autism Board consists of five (5) members appointed by the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. The board consists of one (1) licensed psychologist practicing in the area of applied behavior analysis, three (3) licensed behavior analysts, and one (1) non-licensed public member who is the family member of a recipient of applied behavior analysis services to provide for the licensure and regulation of the practice of applied behavior analysis.

The Board's duties include, but are not limited to:

- Investigating and evaluating applications for individuals seeking licensure to practice applied behavior analysis
- Investigating allegations or practices potentially violating applicable law concerning the practice of applied behavior analysis
- Adopting and revising, as necessary, rules and regulations related to the licensure and practice of applied behavior analysis.
- The Mississippi Autism Board was established by the 2015 Mississippi Legislature under House Bill 885.

The Mississippi Autism Board that provides the licensure and regulation of Applied Behavior Analysis in Mississippi. The Board met six (6) times and administered oral Jurisprudence Examination six (6) times. There are currently (as of June 2024) two hundred and eighteen (218) Licensed Behavior Analysts, eleven (11) Assistant Behavior Analysts, and four hundred and twenty-five (425) registered behavior technicians. On average, the numbers are consistent with 2023 reporting.

## 2023-2025 Mississippi Advisory Committee Members

Name	Appointed By:
Kristie Speights, Parent of autistic child	Governor
Kristin Lape, Employer of autistic individuals and parent of special needs child	Governor
Melody Madaris, Parent of autistic child	Governor
Lynda Balfour, Parent of autistic child	Lieutenant Governor
Kristi Herrin, Parent of autistic child	Lieutenant Governor
CC Bradberry, Parent of autistic child	Speaker of the House
Jennifer Griffin, Parent of autistic child	Speaker of the House
Dr. Jennifer Boykin	MS State Department of Education
Gail Stuart	MS State Department of Education
Sheila Brown	MS State Department of Education
Dr. Jennifer Wallace	MS State Department of Education
Rana Mitchell	MS State Department of Education
Dr. Shelia Anthony	MS State Department of Education
Laura Hines	MS State Department of Education
Vacant	MS State Department of Education
Dr. Kasee Stratton-Gadke	T.K. Martin Center
Dr. Carlen Henington	MS Association of Psychology in the Schools (MAPS)
Antario S. Knight, Ed.S., NCSP	MS Association of Psychology in the Schools (MAPS)
Dr. Jennifer Jackson	Department of Rehabilitation Services
Craig Kittrell, Deputy Executive Director for Intellectual/Developmental Disability Services	Department of Mental Health
Dr. Kristin Merritte, Chief Clinical Officer for Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services	Department of Mental Health
Charles Hughes, Executive Director Mississippi Council of Developmental Disabilities	Department of Mental Health
Dr. Chris Furlow, BCBA-D, LBA	Department of Mental Health

Elizabeth Burklow, Licensed Speech Therapist	MS Speech Language and Hearing Association (MSHA)
Hannah Sanders, Licensed Speech Therapist	MS Speech Language and Hearing Association (MSHA)
Amanda Harlow-Felder, Representative of the MS Department of Insurance	Commissioner of Insurance
Pam Dollar, Executive Director	MS Parent Training and Information Center
Dr. Courtney Walker, Vice Chancellor UMMC Department of Pediatrics ASD Provider	University of MS Medical Center
Vacant	Department of Human Services

Total: 27 filled/29 possible appointments

6/30/2024