MASSACHUSETTS
DOWN SYNDROME
CONGRESS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 10, 2025

Contact:
Joshua Komyerov
MDSC Communications Director
jkomyerov@mdsc.org
617-548-1945 (m)

Governor Maura Healey Signs Landmark A.B.A Therapy Bill into Law, Providing Insurance Coverage for Individuals with Down Syndrome

BOSTON, MA — Governor Maura Healey signed the A.B.A. Therapy Bill, officially named "An Act regarding Applied Behavioral Analysis for Down syndrome" into law on January 9th. The landmark legislation, sponsored by the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC), will require private insurers and MassHealth to cover the cost of in-home ABA therapy for children with a single diagnosis of Down syndrome. It has been MDSC's top statewide policy priority for the past six years.

"We can't thank Governor Healey and House and Senate leaders enough for making the ABA Therapy bill one of their top priorities in the final days of this legislative session," said Maureen Gallagher, MDSC Executive Director. "We applaud them for doing what they needed to pass such an important law before their end-of-year session deadline. It is truly a New Year's gift for many in our community."

"A significant amount of peer-reviewed medical research has concluded that ABA is an effective — often transformative — therapy for individuals with Down syndrome," Gallagher added. "Unfortunately, until now it has remained only available to people with Down syndrome who either happen to have a dual diagnosis of autism or who have family that can afford to pay privately.

MDSC would like to thank Governor Healy and the many state leaders for their critical role in helping pass this legislation: Senate President Karen Spilka and House Speaker Ron Mariano; Senate Ways and Means Committee Chair Michael Rodrigues and Policy Director Jeremy Spittle; House Ways and Means Committee Chair Aaron Michlewitz and Legislative Director Tim Sheridan; our incredible bill sponsors Senator Julian Cyr, Rep. Jack Patrick Lewis, and Rep. Sean Garballey; Senator Bruce Tarr and Rep. Donald Wong; Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing Committee Chairs State Senator Cindy Friedman and Rep. John Lawn; Joint Committee on Financial Services Chairs Sen. Senator Paul Feeney and State Representative James M. Murphy; former House Chair of the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Denise Garlick; and former State Rep. Josh S. Cutler, Undersecretary in the Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development.

MDSC would also like to thank the following individuals for their crucial testimony, support and advocacy: Dr. Brian Skotko, Director of the MassGeneral Hospital Down Syndrome Program and Chair of the MDSC Medical and Scientific Advisory Council; Clorinda Cottrell, MSW, LICSW, Clinical Social Worker; Dr. Nicole Baumer, Former Director of the Down Syndrome Program at Boston Children's Hospital and member of the MDSC Medical and Scientific Advisory Council; Angela Lombardo, MSW, Program Manager of the Down Syndrome Program at Boston Children's Hospital; MDSC Government Affairs Consultant Jane Lane; MDSC Government Affairs Committee Members; Kim Tripp Legendre and each of the MDSC families who bravely testified on behalf of their children during a number of public hearings over the past few years; as well as all our MDSC members who reached out to their local legislator by phone or email to ask for their support.

“Passing this critical legislation just before the end of the year deadline was a true team effort for a larger cause,” Gallagher said. “Ultimately, for those families in our community who need but have not received at-home ABA therapy, insurance coverage will now have the potential to change their and their children's lives in real, meaningful, and lifelong ways." (You can read her full testimony here.)

"For far too long, individuals living with Down syndrome and their families, who endure struggles on a daily basis and would greatly benefit from at-home applied behavioral analysis (ABA) therapy, have unfortunately been denied access because of a decades old discrepancy in how insurance coverage is applied," said State Senator Michael J. Rodrigues (D-Westport), Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. "Fortunately, because of the steadfast advocacy of the Down syndrome community, including the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress, the gap in insurance coverage will be gone thanks to the stroke of Governor Healey's pen. With this new law, health insurers are required to provide insurance coverage for ABA services to families and their children with Down syndrome, ensuring long overdue access to this important and essential therapy that will meaningfully benefit this population for generations to come."

"Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy has proven transformative for so many," said State Senator Julian Cyr,, who sponsored the bill in the Senate, "yet too often, access to this essential support is out of reach for those who need it most. By ensuring insurance coverage for at-home ABA therapy, this legislation will make a powerful difference for families across the Commonwealth, lifting a burden that has existed for too long. It's about time we make this gold-standard care accessible to all, so every child has the chance to realize their fullest potential."

"My first sister was born with Down syndrome, and though she passed away before I was born," recalled State Rep. Jack Patrick Lewis, one of the bill's House sponsors, "the question of how our family and society could have best ensured she had a lifetime of opportunities was regularly discussed in our house. Filing this bill with Rep. Garballey and Senator Cyr answered the same question my mom regularly asked: 'How could we have ensured that my sister had all the opportunities she needed and deserved to thrive?'"

“This legislation will improve the quality of life for those living with Down syndrome across our Commonwealth" said State Rep. Sean Garballey, also a bill co-sponsor. "I have been proud to partner with the MDSC, Representative Lewis, Senator Cyr, and advocates across Massachusetts in working to make sure individuals with Down syndrome have access to services they need to lead fulfilling lives."

Learn more about the MDSC’s state and federal advocacy efforts on MDSC’s Legislative Action Center (mdsc.org/takeaction), one of MDSC’s four Centers of Excellence.

# # #

About the MDSC

The MDSC offers a broad array of programs to serve people with Down syndrome and their families throughout the state, including: our signature Parent’s First Call Program, a volunteer, state-wide group of trained parent mentors available 24/7 that is a national model; two major annual conferences that draw national and international experts in their fields; a Buddy Walk® Program that gives individuals, schools, community groups, and local businesses an opportunity to get involved in fundraising campaigns and events year-round; Self-Advocate Programs like Advocates in Motion and our Self-Advocate Advisory Council, which provide opportunities for teens and adults with Down syndrome while making empowerment a central component. MDSC is established as a local and national leader in disability advocacy, passing more than half a dozen pieces of landmark legislation in MA since 2012. MDSC operates four Centers of Excellence: the Legislative Action Center, National Parents First Call Center, Center on Inclusive Education and Your Next Star Employment Center, as well as a fully searchable online Resource Library.

20 Burlington Mall Road, Suite 261, Burlington, MA 01803 | www.mdsc.org