

## From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Government backs down on removing children from accessing IBI therapy

When the provincial government announced their new Autism Program March 29, it included removing children older than five from receiving Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) therapy. As a result of this decision, approximately 3,500 children who were on a wait list or were receiving therapy became ineligible for IBI therapy.

My Progressive Conservative colleagues, led by Patrick Brown, and I immediately began to hear from families across Ontario. Many parents spoke of the benefits their child experienced from receiving IBI therapy even after the age of five. Over the course of the spring session at the Ontario Legislature, both opposition parties called on the government to reverse their decision. In addition, individuals, organizations and municipalities across the province voiced their opposition to the government's announcement.

After three months of pressure and a new Minister, the provincial government recently announced changes to their new Autism Program, including backing down on their controversial decision to remove children older than five from accessing IBI therapy. No longer will a child be removed from receiving this life-changing therapy simply because of how old they are. Other changes announced by the Minister include shortening the timeline for implementing the new program by a year from 2018 to 2017, as well as ensuring children older than five who were on the waitlist for IBI therapy will receive the necessary supports until the new program is in place.

As the Progressive Conservative critic for Children and Youth services, I am pleased the new Minister of Children and Youth Services listened to our concerns. We owe it to our province's future generations to ensure they are provided every opportunity to reach their fullest potential. That includes having access to supports that promise to make a difference in a child's life.

I want to thank the thousands of parents for their tireless work in pressuring the government to reverse their decision. I also want to thank the experts and organizations for voicing their opposition, as well as the more than 40 municipalities, including six in Dufferin-Caledon, that passed resolutions to support families in their community and calling on the government to allow children of all ages to access IBI therapy. It is because of these efforts that we were able to pressure the government into making these changes to ensure children regardless of their age will continue to receive this life-changing therapy.

I look forward to continue advocating on behalf of families as the government moves forward with the implementation of their new Autism Program; ensuring every child in Ontario reaches their fullest potential.

