

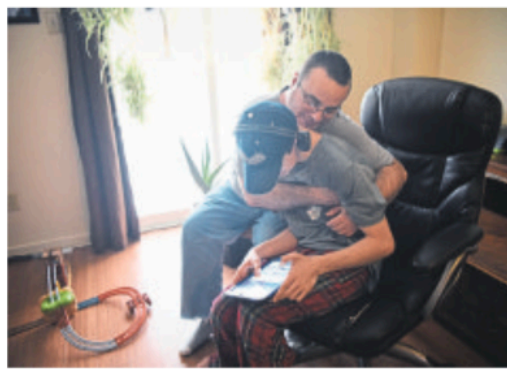
MPP BACKS NEW AUTISM PROGRAM BUT PARENT WANTS MORE DETAILS

FAMILIES WITH AUTISTIC CHILDREN RECEIVING THE ABA THERAPY CAN RENEW FOR SIX MORE MONTHS, BUT DETAILS ARE SCARCE

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Conservative MPP for Vaughan-Woodbridge Michael Tibollo has praised the new autism program announced on March 21 by Lisa MacLeod, minister of children, community and social services. The program changes are set to take effect on April 1. The minister said the Ontario government is working to move all 23,000 children with autism off the wait list "as quickly as possible within the next 18

months," so they have timely access to support. All families of children and youth under the age of 18 with a written diagnosis of autism from a qualified professional will now be eligible for a "childhood budget," the ministry announced. Children under the age of six will receive \$20,000 annually in direct funding while those six and over will receive \$5,000 annually. The government will also explore options to provide children who are currently on the wait list with childhood budgets on a quicker timeline, especially younger children. "Our current plan augmented with the compassionate enhancements we have announced recently will eliminate the wait lists," said Tibollo. "These enhancements will also better support children with autism and their fami-



Justin Greaves/Metroland
 Jason Koblovsky hugs his 14-year-old son Matthew who is severely autistic, inside their home.

lies." However, Jason Koblovsky, whose 14-year-old son Matthew is on the severe end of the autism spectrum, says, "More needs to be done," adding that MacLeod's announcement isn't thoroughly detailed. "She has been very short on details with respect to how this is going to work," Koblovsky, who resides in Georgina, said. "My son comes from the severe end of the spectrum; she pushed us to the end of the cliff." So far, Matthew receives a treatment called applied

behaviour analysis, which costs the Koblovsky family about \$80,000 a year. With the new changes, the Koblovskys are down \$60,000 annually in coverage after waiting more than six years to get access. However, the ministry said all children who currently have an Ontario Autism Program Behaviour Plan, as Matthew does, will continue to receive the services outlined in that plan until its end date. Families will then be able to renew it for six months at its current level of intensity. Children and youth receiving ABA therapy see results and some improvement. For Matthew, his be-

haviour has "calmed down a little bit, and he is communicating a lot more," says his father. The ministry added in its announcement that childhood budgets will allow families access to a broader range of eligible services, such as speech language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. The Koblovsky family had to wait a total six and a half years to gain access to ABA therapy. Initially, they stumbled and faltered with paperwork issues. However, in 2016, under the former Liberal plan, Matthew gained access after spending a year and a half on the official waiting list.

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