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## HALTON HILLS PARENTS SLAM PLAN FOR ONTARIO AUTISM PROGRAM REFORM

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Six-year-old Acton boy Dylan Payne has been receiving therapy for just under a year, after his family waited two years for an autism diagnosis and two additional years before he entered into his current program.

After seeing her son begin to make progress, Maxine Payne says the Progressive Conservative government's Feb. 6 announcement about reforming the provincial autism program has her terrified for Dylan's future.

Dylan receives 30 hours a week of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) therapy at a private facility through Halton Region.

The program helps Dylan, who



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Galvao family photo

Georgetown residents David and Linda Galvao are wondering how the government's new plan for autism funding will impact their sons. The Galvao family from left to right: Linda, Isabella, Toby, Luke and David.

is non-verbal, develop critical life skills, Payne said.

"It's helping to give him coping skills, and giving him the opportunity to communicate and thrive in real life situations," Payne added. "This is going to be so extremely distressing for him and our family overall."

The new provincial plan aims to cut waitlist times by providing families with childhood budgets for their children with autism who are under 18 years of age. It also promises to double the funding for the province's five diagnostic hubs.

The reforms target lower and

middle-income families (making less than \$250,000 annually), with the largest sum of up to \$140,000 being given to families of children two to five years of age.

"Today, almost three out of every four children who require autism supports continue to be stranded on waitlists due to the cynicism and incompetence of the previous government," Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services said during the announcement on Feb. 6. "We cannot, in good conscience, continue treating these parents and children like lower-class citizens."

Under the new provincial changes, Dylan would only be entitled to a maximum amount of \$55,000 from this point forward up until he turns 18.

This would translate to approximately two hours of therapy per week - a 93-per-cent decrease from the frequency of support he is currently receiving.

"You're putting a one-size-fits-all on a diagnosis," Maxine said. "We feel defeated and we deserve better."

Georgetown dad David Galvao,

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