



March 19, 2020

Re: Actions Governors Can Take to Support Direct Support Professionals During COVID-19 Pandemic

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Chair, National Governors Association
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan:

On behalf of the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), the nation's leading voice of disability service providers, we want to graciously acknowledge the extraordinary frontline leadership of our nation's governors during these uncertain times, and are writing today with an urgent request.

ANCOR's members provide long-term care to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the country through Medicaid-funded Home and Community Based Services and Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF-IID). The providers who ensure the health and safety of people with disabilities provide these vital services largely without recognition. They are among the unsung heroes that we hear about daily—especially in the midst of this global health pandemic.

Disability service providers have delivered essential services for decades, working to build a structure of support that allows people to live as independently as possible. A large portion of the people with disabilities supported by providers live in residential settings that require a trained employee to be physically present to conduct their assigned job responsibilities—often 24 hours a day, seven days a week—to vulnerable citizens in community settings who might otherwise face institutionalization.

Despite the mountains these providers move each and every day, they are too often excluded from the considerations that are made by governments at all levels during times of crisis. For that reason, ANCOR has been relentless in our quest to ensure that that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the providers on which they rely are prioritized in federal funding packages designed in response to COVID-19. At the federal level, this includes work ANCOR is leading to request that the U.S. Department of Labor issue an emergency regulation to include disability provider staff and direct support professionals in the definition of essential health care service workers.

As cities across America implement actions such as “shelter-in-place” laws and nightly curfews, it is absolutely essential that states step in where the federal government has not yet. It is for this reason that I write to ask that you please share three no-cost, high-impact actions that your peers across the nation and the National Governors Association can take to strengthen the community programs on which people with intellectual and developmental disabilities rely. These three actions, if taken by state leaders like those that comprise NGA's membership, can go a long way in shoring up a workforce that was in crisis long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

We urge governors to take the following actions as soon as possible:

1. **Issue an executive order designating direct support professionals as “essential workers.”** Currently, home health aides and personal care attendants are considered essential, but direct support professionals (DSPs)—despite fulfilling all the same roles as these other professionals plus much more—aren’t identified as essential. Designating them as such will ensure their unfettered ability to get where they need to go to support our neighbors with disabilities who are relying on their support. Other positions or roles essential to continuing community-based disability supports that should also be deemed essential and may not be able to work remotely include administrative managers/supervisors, medication technicians, clinical support staff, therapists, case managers, housekeeping, maintenance and others.
2. **Encourage displaced workers to consider applying for jobs as Direct Support Professionals.** Before COVID-19, turnover rates within our workforce averaged 51%, and high vacancy rates are certain to be exacerbated by the coronavirus and the havoc it is wreaking on the health care system, schools and more. Meanwhile, millions of workers are being laid off as bars, restaurants, stores, airlines and other industries see demand plummet. To alleviate the DSP workforce crisis *and* mitigate the impacts of rampant unemployment, governors can coordinate with state health, labor and education to encourage those currently without work to consider this rewarding, meaningful career opportunity.
3. **Publicly recognize the important work direct support professionals do in the community.** Ohio Governor Mike DeWine led the way on this front by specifically [acknowledging the lengths to which DSPs are going to ensure the most vulnerable populations in our community are being cared for](#) in the midst of this crisis. Following Gov. DeWine’s lead, efforts by governors to praise the work of DSPs would legitimize the DSP workforce, ensuring they are considered frontline workers in need of personal protective equipment, *and* would help these unsung heroes feel appreciated at a time when they are operating under unprecedented stress.

We appreciate you considering sharing these measures with your peers, and hope the staff at NGA can help amplify this important and timely message. If we can support your efforts or those of NGA to emphasize the need to support people with I/DD and the professionals who keep them healthy and safe, do not hesitate to be in touch with me via email at smccracken@ancor.org.

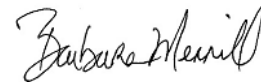
Sincerely,



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