



October 27, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), I write to urge your support for the investment included in the Build Back Better Agenda to support expanded access to Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) and stabilization of the direct care workforce that supports people who rely on HCBS.

ANCOR is a national, nonprofit trade association representing more than 1,600 private community providers of services to people with disabilities, mostly funded by the Medicaid program. Combined, we support over one million individuals with disabilities, and work to share policy, shape solutions, and strengthen the community. Through the Medicaid program, which funds the majority of disability supports in the United States, our members offer a broad range of supports to help people with disabilities live full and independent lives in the community.

Congress must address the crisis facing the direct care workforce—a crisis which has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2021 survey conducted by ANCOR reveals a dire situation of high turnover and insufficient staffing among providers. According to ANCOR's 2021 *State of America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis*¹ survey:

- 77% of providers have been forced to turn away new referrals.
- 58% of providers have discontinued programs and services.
- 81% of providers are struggling to achieve quality standards.
- Nearly 3 in 10 providers report spending at least \$500,000 annually on costs associated with high turnover and vacancy rates.
- 92% of providers report that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to complicate their ability to recruit and retain qualified direct support professionals, in large part because industries that previously paid comparable wages now pay employees more than providers can afford to offer.

¹ American Network of Community Options and Resources, *The State of America's Direct Support Workforce 2021*, available at https://www.ancor.org/sites/default/files/the_state_of_americas_direct_support_workforce_crisis_2021.pdf.

These relentless challenges illustrate why a robust investment in dedicated support for HCBS is necessary to begin addressing the magnitude of unmet need in our communities. A growing workforce crisis has resulted in a decrease in accessibility of HCBS for people with disabilities. Currently, nearly 600,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are on states' HCBS waiting lists. These waiting lists leave people with disabilities and their families waiting years and even decades for services.

The Build Back Better Agenda initially included a bold proposal for an investment of \$400 billion in HCBS. However, as Congress continues to negotiate that investment downward, it is critical that the Build Back Better legislation contain a minimum of at least \$250 billion for HCBS. Without such an investment, states cannot expand access to services for people with I/DD or meaningfully invest in the direct care workforce—a workforce which is predominantly composed of women and workers of color. Partial funding provides only for stopgap approaches without long-term solutions or sustainable infrastructure. Continuing to underinvest undermines the very goal of this legislation, which is to strengthen the ability of people with disabilities and our aging neighbors to live a life with dignity in their homes and communities. Without a sustainable direct care workforce, access to services remains threatened. Meanwhile, local communities forgo opportunities to create countless jobs and strengthen local economies.

This Build Back Better Act is an historic opportunity to repair the cracks in the existing infrastructure and create infrastructure that was never built in the first place, all to ensure HCBS is within reach for the nearly one million families currently on waiting lists. Absent the necessary investments—particularly in an overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated direct care workforce—the Medicaid HCBS program will continue to fall far short of reaching everyone in need.

ANCOR remains grateful for your leadership and now respectfully asks that you continue to prioritize the needs of people with disabilities and the more than one million workers who deliver their services by investing in the Medicaid HCBS program.

We appreciate your consideration of this important matter. Please reach out to Shannon McCracken, Vice President for Government Relations (smccracken@ancor.org) if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Merrill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Merrill
Chief Executive Officer