



February 28, 2020

The Honorable Maggie Hassan
United States Senator
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senator
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hassan and Senator Collins:

On behalf of the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), I am writing to thank you for introducing *Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act*. We strongly support the bill's call for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to compile precise employment data on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), frontline workers who support people with disabilities so they can have full and independent lives. This data is needed to inform the creation of policies to strengthen this important workforce and ultimately, improve the quality of life of people with disabilities.

ANCOR is a national, nonprofit trade association representing more than 1,600 private community providers of services to people with disabilities. Combined, we support over one million individuals with disabilities, and work to shape policy, share solutions and strengthen the community. Our members and the DSPs they employ help individuals through a broad range of highly tailored supports, including helping individuals: find employment; get ready for the day; develop social skills, and know what decisions to make to remain healthy.

BLS collects employment data through a standard occupational code (SOC). Currently, BLS classifies DSPs in the broader SOC of personal care aides (PCAs) and home health aides (HHAs). Combined, PCAs and HHAs are some of the most needed occupations in the country, requiring over 1 million new workers over the next decade. However, the highly tailored nature of DSPs' work makes their duties more diverse than those of PCAs and HHAs and requires different skills. Additionally, DSPs' work is entirely funded by Medicaid, while PCAs' and HHAs' funding streams include private pay. Your bill requiring BLS to document those differences will lead to stronger policymaking on this issue.

The lack of a DSP-specific SOC hinders the creation of effective policies for this largely invisible workforce. Without specific federal data, states do not have adequate tools to project employment trends and/or establish realistic wage rates. States heavily rely on SOC data to determine the rates paid to providers of disability supports, including the cost of DSP wages. The lack of data also means the federal government does not have a strong sense of how states are investing in this workforce. This is leading to missed opportunities to strengthen this workforce, which is undergoing a massive retention and recruitment crisis with a 51 percent yearly average turnover rate. The crisis in turn has serious repercussions for the well-being of people with disabilities. As such, we hope your SOC legislation will give policymakers the tools they need to ensure stable disability supports.

We are grateful for your attention to this important issue in the disability community and look forward to continuing to work with your office on this. Please reach out to me at smeek@ancor.org – ANCOR is happy to be a resource.

Sincerely,

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

Sarah Meek
Senior Director of Legislative Affairs