



January 21, 2021

President Joe Biden  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

On behalf of the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), congratulations on assuming the office of the President of the United States. We look forward to working with your Administration and have found meetings we have had with members of your transition team to be encouraging. While the COVID-19 relief proposal you and your team unveiled on January 14 contains many provisions that would assist the disability community, it behooves us to state our disappointment that the proposal does not explicitly prioritize funding for the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) program. This program has been essential to people with I/DD during the pandemic but is now at the breaking point because of funding challenges and increased demand. We hope to work with you to urgently ensure its viability.

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 community. Our members range from small agencies to multi-state organizations, non-profit and for-profit, and offer a broad range of supports which help people with I/DD live full and independent lives in the community. Examples of these supports include assistance with making decisions on health, getting groceries, daily hygiene and finding employment. These agencies have been on the frontline of the pandemic, ensuring people with I/DD can stay safely at home rather than have to move to congregate facilities where they are more liable to contract COVID-19.

The individuals we support are highly vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus because they often have multiple underlying medical conditions. In fact, researchers from John Hopkins University and the West Health Institute [identified](#) people with developmental disorders as the most likely to die of COVID-19 compared to other mortality groups. Additionally, the frontline workers who support them – known as Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) – are also vulnerable because they are often unable to physical distance. That is because of the personal nature of some of the supports individuals need, such as helping with hygiene practices. While we understand that your Administration will have to juggle many competing demands, we call on you to prioritize relief for the HCBS program because of the increased vulnerability of the individuals we support.

The HCBS program is the largest funder of disability supports in the United States – however, it is a fragile program because it is structured as an optional Medicaid waiver service. We specifically ask for the HCBS program to be directly referenced in future versions of your COVID-19 proposal because its optional nature makes the program highly liable to be cut when states face financial duress. There is historical precedent of states re-routing funding from the HCBS program to other programs during recessions. The risk is particularly high right now, when states face unprecedented needs imposed by the pandemic and loss of revenue. While we understand that your proposal would offer states and localities financial support, we fear that without an explicit mention of the HCBS program in your proposals, none of that broader support would trickle down to the HCBS program. Given that the pandemic has ravaged the disability community, it is imperative that this program be bolstered so as to save the lives of an already very underserved population.

We are eager to share proposals for your team to explore to ensure that people with I/DD and the programs who support them live through the pandemic. It will also be essential to ensure that these programs are able to meet the needs of individuals as economies and society as a whole re-opens after the pandemic. We are also happy to connect your staff with Congressional champions who can help you turn these proposals into law.

We hope you appreciate the urgency of this request and look forward to continuing these discussions with your Administration.

Sincerely,

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

Sarah L. Meek, MSW  
Senior Director of Legislative Affairs