



April 23, 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) and the state provider associations listed below, we write to urge you to support the inclusion of provisions to strengthen Medicaid disability programs in the jobs and infrastructure package Congress is crafting in response to President Biden's American Jobs Plan. We appreciate the hard work Congress put into legislation over the past 13 months to ensure that disability programs can weather the pandemic. To ensure that these programs can come back stronger to meet increased demand after the pandemic, we encourage you to adopt policies that recognize that systems designed to deliver care are as essential as physical infrastructure when rebuilding this nation's care economy.

ANCOR is a national, nonprofit trade association representing more than 1,600 private community providers of services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Combined, we employ more than a half-million professionals to support over one million individuals with I/DD. We work to shape policy, share solutions and strengthen community so that everyone, regardless of their disability, can be included in society. The supports our members deliver help people with disabilities have full lives while staying healthy and safe, particularly during the pandemic. These supports are mainly delivered by direct support professionals (DSPs) who assist with essential tasks such as grocery shopping, daily hygiene, finding employment, maintaining relationships with family and friends, and making informed health decisions. So our membership can best support the needs of people with I/DD across the country, Congress must make two important investments in disability programs.

First, we urge Congress to fund the expansion of the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) program. The HCBS program is, at its heart, a complex system that delivers services that allow people with disabilities to participate in society. It has suffered from decades of underinvestment, to the point that states cannot meet demand for the program—the latest data from Kaiser Family Foundation finds that more than 590,000 families are on states' HCBS waiting lists. This in turn has led to worse health, financial and social outcomes for people with disabilities, ultimately weakening this nation's economy and the strength of our communities. The pandemic has clearly illustrated how infrastructure permeates every aspect of the delivery of health services. There is clearer evidence than ever before of the stark disparities in outcomes between urban or suburban areas and rural areas—areas that were not able to fully leverage telemedicine and virtual supports due to lack of access to broadband internet.

To exclude care delivery systems in your jobs and infrastructure legislation would be akin to building an airport terminal but forgoing the cost of adding a runway. Investments in the HCBS program would rise the tide to lift all boats—by creating jobs that empower more people to stay healthy, participate in community life and contribute to our economy.

Second, we urge Congress to fund higher Medicaid reimbursement rates to shore up the direct support workforce. DSPs, as mentioned above, are the backbone of disability support programs, meaning we can't improve disability supports without strengthening this essential workforce. Eliminating the unmet need of hundreds of thousands of Americans with disabilities will require attracting and retaining more DSPs, particularly in light of a long-running recruitment and retention crisis that stems largely from shamefully low Medicaid wage reimbursement rates. Combined with the emotionally demanding nature of supporting individuals with Autism, Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and other intellectual and developmental disabilities, states' low reimbursement rates tie providers' hands and contribute significantly to high turnover. The most recent data from National Core Indicators finds that turnover within the direct support workforce averages 43 percent nationally and is as high as 65 percent in some states. This high turnover has had tangible effects on people with disabilities' outcomes, as [recent research](#) shows.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have about various proposals under consideration that would strengthen the HCBS program and the DSP workforce. Please reach out to Sarah Meek, ANCOR's Senior Director of Legislative Affairs, at smeek@ancor.org.

We truly hope Congress will seize this opportunity to invest in systems that facilitate the delivery of disability supports, thus addressing this nation's short-term jobs and infrastructure needs while preventing unnecessary costs associated with further neglect to these programs in the long-term.

We appreciate your consideration and stand ready to be a resource to you as you further the prospects for inclusion for the most vulnerable in our country.

Sincerely,



Barbara Merrill
Chief Executive Officer
ANCOR

Alaska



Lizette Stiehr
Executive Director
Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities

Arizona



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Colorado



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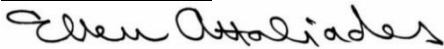
Laura Cordes
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(MACSP)

Maryland



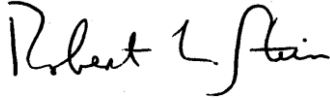
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Pennsylvania



Mark Davis
Pennsylvania Advocates and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities
President & CEO



Richard S. Edley, PhD
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South Dakota



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Executive Director
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Tennessee



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Sandy Frizzell Batton
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Virginia Network of Private Providers. Inc.



Karen Tefelski
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Virginia Association of Community Rehabilitation Program

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Charlie Luke
Executive Director
Utah Association of Community Services

Vermont

Lynne Cleveland Vitzthum
Developmental Disabilities Services Director
Vermont Care Partners

Washington



Scott Livengood
Legislative Chair
Community Residential Services Association

Cc: Members of the Senate
Members of the House of Representatives
President Biden
Vice President Harris
HHS Secretary Becerra
DOL Secretary Walsh