



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

April 13, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The undersigned co-chairs of the CCD Long-term Services and Supports taskforce write in response to the growing outbreak of COVID-19 across the United States, and the growing need for home and community-based services (HCBS) of people with disabilities in the face of the pandemic. The first three legislative packages all but ignored the critical need for HCBS and the dire need for funds to stabilize the system through this crisis and support the workforce that provides these essential services.

People with disabilities are, and will be, particularly at risk as COVID-19 continues to spread across the country, facing high risk of complications and death if exposed to the outbreak and needing to isolate themselves for protection. We urge Congress to focus on people with disabilities and their needs in the fourth COVID-19 bill. Specifically, as the fourth piece of legislation moves forward, we urge Congress to ensure that emergency HCBS grant funding is included in the next COVID-19 legislative package.

Meaningful investments in HCBS are one of the most important steps Congress can take to safeguard the disability community. The fourth package must fund HCBS grants, such as the ones found in the [Corona Virus Relief for Seniors and People with Disabilities](#) (HR 6305, S. 3544) to provide additional funds to strapped state HCBS systems and to support the Direct Support Professional (DSP) and Home Health Workforce. Without additional resources, aging adults and people with disabilities will be forced out of their homes and communities and into congregate settings, at grave risk to their health--as

demonstrated by severe and persistent outbreaks in nursing facilities, institutions and other settings that are proving a danger to the health of people with disabilities.

Additionally, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), personal care attendants, and other direct care workers, whether paid for through Medicaid, the VA or other federal programs, or through private payment arrangements, should be designated essential personnel in order to ensure access to PPE. DSPs and other direct care workers are not currently included in the definitions of Essential Workers who are prioritized for access to personal protective equipment (PPE). DSPs are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, assisting people with underlying conditions and disabilities with tasks such as toileting, eating, and bathing. Often these services cannot be provided from 6 feet away and require close personal contact. We are already seeing tragic cases of people with disabilities dying after being infected by their DSPs. The work DSPs do is essential, and they must have access to the tools they need to do their job safely.

We were glad to see that the important work of direct support professionals, personal care attendants and home health aides was included in the “Heroes Fund” proposal. We support the concept of paying essential employees additional wages directly for the work that they are doing during the pandemic. We also are glad to see that there are components to assist with recruitment to this and other vital workforces. Direct care workers are a core part of the infrastructure of our nation’s HCBS system, but there are many other components in jeopardy without immediate funding. This fund would be a valuable supplement to the critical and urgently needed HCBS grants, which will provide crucial resources to stabilize the critical community services provider network, support providers of HCBS services to transform service delivery to reach seniors and people with disabilities who are isolated due to the response to COVID-19, move individuals from HCBS waitlists as needed to address emergencies when other support networks fail, and continue to assure the health and welfare of the people they serve during the extraordinary disruption caused by the pandemic. The broader HCBS grants would also allow states the flexibility to pay for additional training for DSPs, purchase PPE, and pay more overtime wages.

We know that we must act now to prevent much of the worst impact of this outbreak. We urge Congress to act quickly, incorporate these urgent disability community priorities in the 4th COVID-19 legislative package, and promptly pass this crucial legislation. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Nicole Jorwic: jorwic@thearc.org

Sincerely,

Long-Term Services and Supports Co-Chairs

Alison Barkoff,
Center for Public Representation

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