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April 28th, 2023

Members of the General Assembly:

As the organizations representing Pennsylvania's Intellectual Disabilities/Autism (ID/A) service providers, we are asking you to include \$430 million in your 2023-2024 state general fund budget proposal to significantly improve the wage rates for the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who provide care to individuals with ID/A. This funding and its federal match are crucial because the ID/A system is in crisis. Nearly 60,000 Pennsylvanians with ID/A are at risk of losing or experiencing a reduction of essential services because there are not enough DSPs to care for them. More specifically:

- After years of underfunding, the most recent rate increase (January 2022) did not provide enough of an increase to keep providers competitive with the current job market. Through March 2023, inflation has increased by 7.2% since these new rates went into effect, leaving providers playing catch up without the ability to raise prices to meet increased costs. Providers of intellectual disability and autism (ID/A) services continue to constantly struggle to recruit and retain sufficient Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to care for people with ID/A.
- Underinvestment in community services has resulted in reduced capacity. It has placed tremendous strain on individuals, families, and ID/A providers who cannot offer competitive wages to retain and attract DSPs. A survey of 130 providers found that services have shrunk by 11%, with the sample alone showing that 4,000 individuals with an approved waiver have lost services. Further, low wages, high turnover, and the economic impact of DSP underinvestment disproportionately affect female and minority workers, as they comprise the majority of the DSP workforce.
- Direct Support Professionals keep this system moving; they provide support and services 24/7, 365 days a year. Services and supports do not have holidays and do not close for weather. Providers have consistently invested in wages, above all other increasing costs. Currently, the state rates assume a base wage of \$14.25 an hour; however, our data demonstrates that, on average, our DSPs are paid \$16.72 an hour. Providers are operating on shoestring budgets to provide quality services and supports, but investments are going directly to the workforce.

- People who lost their services during the pandemic, particularly those in day or employment programs, continue to go without services and are cared for by parents or other family caregivers. As a result, we have heard from many families who must provide 24/7 care for their adult children, many of whom have significant medical and behavioral issues. This includes elderly parents who are physically or emotionally unable to provide this care without risking their health and safety. Finally, a growing number of family caregivers are quitting their jobs to provide care and are losing their homes, health care, and retirement savings. Families have become the safety net, and this is not sustainable.
- Due to the DSP shortage, Pennsylvanians with complex needs and multiple diagnoses are at even greater risk. DSPs who support them require greater training and operate in a higher-risk environment.
- More than 12,000 people remain on the Pennsylvania waiting list for ID/A services. Of these individuals, 5,400 individuals have an Emergency Need. These people are at high risk and require services immediately, yet providers often do not have the staff capacity to serve them now.
- ID/A is funded through a single-payer system with Medicaid dollars administered by the Commonwealth. There are no additional resources available to support community ID/A services.

***Investing \$430 million in 2023-2024 state general funds (with its federal match) to increase rates for DSP wages will address provider concerns with inflation and other market-based cost indicators. More importantly, it will relieve the tremendous strain on families who can't get the services they need and enable ID/A providers to offer competitive wages to retain and attract DSPs.***

In addition, we urge your support to preserve the Home and Community-Based Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Augmentation Account established in the 2022-2023 Fiscal Code. This Account ensures funds committed to Pennsylvania's remaining state centers (currently \$111.1 million in state funds) and any proceeds from their liquidation stay in the community ID/A system.

This is a critical time for service delivery. Providers across the Commonwealth are on the brink, and action needs to be taken to ensure the system continues and waiting lists do not continue to grow. We need to invest in this workforce, we need more Direct Support Professionals, and we need your support and investment into this system. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Community Service Providers  
 The Arc of Pennsylvania  
 Max Association  
 Pennsylvania Advocates and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities  
 The Provider Alliance  
 Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association