October 25, 2002

MH/MR COALITION UPDATE

The MH/MR Coalition continues to strategize to get more money into the Mental Health and Mental Retardation systems in order to provide quality services through improved recruitment and retention. The latest Update is included in this Info.

A member of the MH/MR Coalition received the Raymond Webb award at the PCPA Annual Conference last week. In introducing the award, Ray referred to times when the providers and counties were at odds when he stated that what he was going to do was like parting the sea and similar to the miracle of loaves and fishes. He presented the award to two County representatives: Mike Chambers of the MH/MR Administrators and Kathy Hubert of the Single County Drug and Alcohol Authorities. Mike has worked with all of us to forge bonds that will enable a stronger approach to the legislature and the administration. We are pleased and proud that our colleague earned this recognition and award. Kathy is also a friend of PCPA and works in coalition with us in efforts to improve the drug and alcohol system. Please congratulate them when you see them!

MH/MR Coalition

Working Together Campaign Update

The Sessions/Capps Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution (H.Con.Res. 477)

On Tuesday, September 24th, U.S. Representatives Pete Sessions (R-TX) and Lois Capps (D-CA) introduced the Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution (H.Con.Res. 477). The Resolution expresses the sense of the Congress that community inclusion for individuals with mental retardation or developmental disabilities is at serious risk because of the crisis in recruiting and retaining direct support professionals, which impedes the availability of a stable, quality workforce.

A number of individuals spoke at a nationally televised press conference announcing the concurrent resolution, including a direct support worker who works an average of 140 hours every two weeks, juggling two jobs and college courses, to support her family. She told the crowd, “We are in training everyday. Everyday is a challenge.” She assured the audience, “We will continue to do our job, but we deserve to be recognized.” The Honorable Pete Sessions strongly agreed and challenged those attending the press conference to go to the Hill and “tell your story.”

Representative Lois Capps, co-sponsor of the resolution and former nurse, praised the “tremendous dedication” of direct support staff, even as they were “held hostage by dwindling budgets” and were forced to constantly ask themselves, “can I afford to continue to provide these services?”

The Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution is consistent with the Working Together Campaign Principles. The MH/MR Coalition supports the Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution as a way to prioritize the recruitment and retention crisis in community MH and MR services and supports. The MH/MR Coalition is currently exploring a number of ways to keep the recruitment and retention crisis on the front burner with our state legislators. Look to future Working Together Campaign Updates to detail legislative activities on the state-level, and what you can do to support them.

The following national organizations joined with ANCOR in offering their wholehearted support of the Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution:

- American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR),
- CARF (The Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission),
- The Arc of the United States,
- The Council on Quality and Leadership,
- The National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals, and
- The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS).

The Resolution has gained 3 more sponsors within the past few days and is currently referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

This workforce shortage is the most significant barrier to states implementing Olmstead and undermines the capacity of providers to meet the promise of community integration for individuals with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities in the President’s New Freedom Initiative. While direct support professionals have a variety of job titles, these jobs are always emotionally and physically challenging. Direct support professionals are the quiet heroes that empower people with disabilities to live and work in the community.

Here’s what you can do:

1. **Secure Additional House Cosponsors:** Contact your U.S. Representative and tell your story. Ask him/her to co-sponsor the Sessions/Capps Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution (H.Con.Res. 477). Use the attached sample letter and fax or email your Representative. You can locate the fax number and email address of your Representative by using the House Directory online at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov).

2. **Keep the MH/MR Coalition Informed:** Remember to let the MH/MR Coalition know of your contacts and results. You are welcome to contact any of the associations listed below.

3. **Continue to advocate on behalf of the Working Together Campaign:** Continue to share the Working Together Campaign Update with all interested parties. Let your local legislators know that the recruitment and retention crisis has reached the attention of Congress and the federal government through the Sessions/Capps Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution (H.Con.Res. 477).

This Working Together Campaign Update contains:

- House Concurrent Resolution 477, the Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution
- A sample letter you can use with your U.S. Representative.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED ADVOCACY FOR OUR QUIET HEROES
October 25, 2002

107th CONGRESS
2d Session
H. CON. RES. 477

Expressing the sense of the Congress that community inclusion and enhanced lives for individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities is at serious risk because of the crisis in recruiting and retaining direct support professionals, which impedes the availability of a stable, quality direct support workforce.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SEPTEMBER 24, 2002

Mr. SESSIONS (for himself and Mrs. CAPPS) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Congress that community inclusion and enhanced lives for individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities is at serious risk because of the crisis in recruiting and retaining direct support professionals, which impedes the availability of a stable, quality direct support workforce.

Whereas there are more than 8,000,000 Americans who have mental retardation or other developmental disabilities;

Whereas individuals with developmental disabilities include those with mental retardation, autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, epilepsy, and other related conditions;

Whereas individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities have substantial limitations on their functional capacities, including limitations in two or more of the areas of self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency, as well as the continuous need for individually planned and coordinated services;

Whereas for the past two decades individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities and their families have increasingly expressed their desire to live and work in their communities, joining the mainstream of American life;

Whereas the Supreme Court, in its Olmstead decision, affirmed the right of individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities to receive community-based services as an alternative to institutional care;

Whereas the demand for community supports and services is rapidly growing, as States comply with the Olmstead decision and continue to move more individuals from institutions into the community;

Whereas the demand will also continue to grow as family caregivers age, individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities live longer, waiting lists grow, and services expand;

Whereas our Nation's long-term care delivery system is dependent upon a disparate array of public and private funding sources, and is not a conventional industry, but rather is financed primarily through third-party insurers;

Whereas Medicaid financing of supports and services to individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities varies considerably from State to State, causing significant disparities across geographic regions, among differing groups of consumers, and between community and institutional supports;

Whereas outside of families, private providers that employ direct support professionals deliver the majority of supports and services for individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities in the community;

Whereas direct support professionals provide a wide range of supportive services to individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities on a day-to-day basis, including habilitation, health needs, personal care and hygiene, employment, transportation, recreation, and housekeeping and other home management-related supports and services so that these individuals can live and work in their communities;

Whereas direct support professionals generally assist individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities to lead a self-directed family, community, and social life;

Whereas private providers and the individuals for whom they provide supports and services are in jeopardy as a result of the growing crisis in recruiting and retaining a direct support workforce;

Whereas providers of supports and services to individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities typically draw from a labor market that competes with other entry-level jobs that provide less physically and emotionally demanding work, and higher pay and other benefits, and therefore these direct support jobs are not currently competitive in today's labor market;

Whereas annual turnover rates of direct support workers range from 40 to 75 percent;

Whereas high rates of employee vacancies and turnover threaten the ability of providers to achieve their core mission, which is the provision of safe and high-quality supports to individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities;

Whereas direct support staff turnover is emotionally difficult for the individuals being served;

Whereas many parents are becoming increasingly afraid that there will be no one available to take care of their sons and daughters with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities who are living in the community; and

Whereas this workforce shortage is the most significant barrier to implementing the Olmstead decision and undermines the expansion of community integration as called for by President Bush's New Freedom Initiative, placing the community support infrastructure at risk: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.
This resolution may be cited as the `Direct Support Professional Recognition Resolution'.

SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING SERVICES OF DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.
It is the sense of the Congress that the Federal Government and the States should make it a priority to ensure a stable, quality direct support workforce for individuals with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities that advances our Nation's commitment to community integration for such individuals and to personal security for them and their families.
SAMPLE LETTER

(DATE)

Dear Member of Congress:

As your constituent, I am writing to inform you that community inclusion and enhanced lives for people with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities (MR/DD) is at serious risk because of the direct support professional recruitment and retention crisis that is impeding the availability of a stable, quality workforce. I urge you to draw much needed attention to this crisis by co-sponsoring the Sessions/Capps resolution (H.Con. Res. 477,) which recognizes the importance of a stable, quality direct support workforce.

Direct support professionals play an indispensable role in ensuring individuals with MR/DD have the tools they need to be able to live and work in their communities. They provide a wide range of supportive services on a day-to-day basis to these individuals, including habilitation, health needs, personal care and hygiene, employment, transportation, recreation, housekeeping and other home management-related assistance. While a rewarding profession, direct support work is not easy and can, in fact, be physically and emotionally challenging.

Unfortunately, because of Medicaid budget constraints, direct support professionals earn an average hourly wage of just $7.97 (the national median for all U.S. workers is $11.87 per hour). Such wages in comparison to other entry-level jobs that provide less physically and emotionally demanding work, as well as higher pay and other benefits, makes the direct support profession unattractive in the current labor market. The severity of the staffing shortages and turnover rates in the direct support workforce threatens the quality and continuity of community supports and services for people with MR/DD.

The demand for community supports and services is growing rapidly as states move more individuals from institutions into the community and implement the Supreme Court’s Olmstead decision and the President’s New Freedom Initiative. Yet without quality and continuity in direct support services, people with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities are at risk and unable to live full and productive lives in their communities. Many parents are becoming increasingly afraid that there will be no one available to take care of their sons and daughters with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. If they cannot care for them, who will provide the critical supports necessary for them to live independent, productive lives in the community?
We need your help now! Without national attention to this workforce crisis, private providers of community supports and services will not be able to attract qualified direct support professionals necessary to assist people with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities to live in the community. Please take action NOW by becoming a co-sponsor of the Sessions/Capps resolution. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you on this.

Sincerely,

Signature:______________________________________________________

Print Name:_____________________________________________________

Agency/Organization:  ____________________________________________

Address:________________________________________________________

City/State/Zip:__________________________________________________