

# *ID/A COALITION*

*THE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND AUTISM SERVICES COALITION OF PENNSYLVANIA*

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December 3, 2021

Senator Toomey  
455 Dirksen Senate  
Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Toomey:

The undersigned disability service associations representing disability service providers and individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism (ID/A) in Pennsylvania write to share our support for the investment included in the Build Back Better Act. The BBB Act, as passed by the House of Representatives, will strengthen the direct support professional workforce and sustain and expand access to Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). The longstanding direct support professional (DSP) worker shortage has grown during the pandemic and decreased access to HCBS for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania and negatively impacted the quality of supports those individuals receive. Supporting this historic investment is crucial to strengthening and growing the DSP workforce so that all people with disabilities may lead safe and fulfilled lives.

HCBS has grown exponentially since its inception 40 years ago and now plays an outsized role in ensuring people can be supported in their communities. HCBS allows millions of Americans to live in their homes and participate in their communities. However, absent the necessary infrastructure investments to sustain the DSP workforce, Medicaid HCBS programs will continue falling far short of reaching everyone in need. Decades of underinvestment in the DSP workforce have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a heightened workforce crisis and the disintegration of our HCBS system. Disability service providers are struggling to compete for staff with higher paying positions in entry-level industries, including convenience stores, retail, and fast food. The exodus of DSPs from the field has left individuals with disabilities without consistent access to critical support and at a higher risk for hospitalization and institutionalization. The lack of access to services has put additional strain on already over-burdened families who are forced to quit their jobs and provide 24/7 support to their adult children with disability.

A Pennsylvania study conducted earlier this year found that employee turnover among ID/A providers is approaching 60%, while employee vacancy is at 25%. ID/A service capacity had been reduced by 24% during the pandemic. The inability to hire new DSPs, puts more strain on the existing DSPs, leading to burnout and employee turnover. Providers across the state are reducing services, consolidating homes, and unable to bring on new consumers due to staffing levels and concerns for health and safety.

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The ID/A Coalition consists of statewide advocacy and provider organizations advocating for services for people with intellectual disability and autism in Pennsylvania.

For additional information, contact any of the organizations listed:

Disability Rights Pennsylvania (800.692.7443) Rehabilitation & Community Providers Association (717.364.3280)

PA Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability (717.236.2374)

The Arc of PA (717.234.2621)

In fact, a 2021 survey conducted by the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) reveals that 77% of providers have been forced to turn away new referrals, 58% have discontinued programs and services, 81% are struggling to achieve quality standards. Nearly 3 in 10 providers reported spending at least \$500,000 annually on costs associated with high turnover and vacancy rates. In addition, 92% of providers report that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to complicate their ability to recruit and retain qualified direct support professionals, in large part because industries that previously paid comparable wages now pay employees more than providers can afford to offer.

These relentless challenges illustrate why support for HCBS is essential. As negotiations continue on Build Back Better Act, it is critical that the legislation maintains at least the same nearly \$150 billion investment in HCBS as included in the House-passed version of the bill. These crucial funds are the minimum investment necessary for states to begin building a sustainable HCBS infrastructure that can start to address the collapse of our ability to meet the need in our communities. This funding would not only strengthen the ability of people with disabilities and our aging neighbors to live a life with dignity in their homes and communities, but it would create countless jobs and boost local economies.

We urge you to prioritize the needs of people with disabilities by supporting the Build Back Better Act. Please vote in favor of this legislation to strengthen and expand the Medicaid HCBS program.

If you have questions or would like to discuss further, please feel free to contact any of us below.

Sincerely,



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Mark Davis, President and CEO  
PAR (Pennsylvania Advocates and Resources for  
Autism and Intellectual Disabilities)



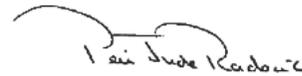
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Sherri Landis, Executive Director  
The Arc of Pennsylvania



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Richard Edley, Ph.D., President and CEO  
RCPA (Rehabilitation & Community Providers  
Association)



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Peri Jude Radecic, Esquire, CEO  
Disability Rights Pennsylvania

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