

The Disability and Aging Collaborative

July 28, 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

Dear Leaders McConnell and Schumer,

The Disability and Aging Collaborative (DAC) is a group of national Disability and Aging organizations that work together to promote policies to support the unique needs of people with disabilities and aging adults.

As we have written several times since the beginning of the pandemic, people with disabilities and older adults are particularly at risk as COVID-19 spreads across the country, facing high risk of complications and death if exposed to the outbreak and needing to isolate to protect themselves. We sent a letter in June with over 250 organizations from DAC and allied groups highlighting the urgent need of the disability and aging communities and service systems, specifically highlighting the need for dedicated funding for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS).

We were extremely disappointed to see that none of the components of the Heals Act that was introduced yesterday provided any funding to support the Medicaid program, including desperately needed HCBS funding. This funding is critically important as State HCBS programs must continue to provide these life-sustaining daily in-home services even as they face staff shortages due to sickness, self-isolation, childcare needs, and low wages. HCBS service workers have struggled to get protective equipment even in the face of higher infection risk.

Republican and Democratic governors and Medicaid Directors have strongly supported additional federal Medicaid assistance as states face unprecedented declines in revenues and historic budget shortfalls that undermine their ability to meet the growing needs of vulnerable populations. We urge you to support the 14% general (Federal Medical Assistance Percentages) FMAP increase and urge you to maintain the strong maintenance of effort (MOE) protections that were included in the Families First Act.

We have seen that as states face of budget crises and other stressors, they are responding cutting Medicaid benefits, eligibility or payments to providers. That is why, during a pandemic, federal funding must increase to states to maintain the stability of the Medicaid program including both the general and HCBS specific FMAP bump. The general FMAP bump, while important, does not go far enough to address these extra burdens specific to the vitally important HCBS programs. Without this dedicated funding stream, states may not be able to sustain vital HCBS that people with

disabilities and aging adults rely on to stay safely in their homes and communities and lower the risks of infection that are inherent in institutionalization.

We urge lawmakers and leadership to continue their efforts to incorporate the above priorities as you negotiate the next COVID-19 legislation. If you have any questions, feel free to contact DAC co-chairs Nicole Jorwic (jorwic@thearc.org) and Howard Bedlin (Howard.Bedlin@ncoa.org)

Sincerely,

Disability and Aging Collaborative

Enc. 6/15/20 DAC Letter