



U.S. SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
Empowering People with Disabilities to Live, Work, Learn, and Thrive
Thursday, December 12, 2024

The American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) appreciates the opportunity to provide a statement for the record in response to this Committee's hearing, *Empowering People with Disabilities to Live, Work, Learn, and Thrive*.

Founded more than 50 years ago, ANCOR is a national, nonprofit association representing 2,600 private community providers of long-term supports and services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), as well as 62 state provider associations. Combined, our members support more than one million individuals with I/DD across their lifespan, and are funded almost exclusively by Medicaid. Our mission is to advance the ability of our members to support people with I/DD to fully participate in their communities.

Chair Casey's Leadership to Support People with Disabilities

ANCOR strives to empower its members to better serve their communities by strengthening the infrastructure of Medicaid-funded I/DD services. In that work, we rely on the leadership of members of Congress to push forward legislative solutions to the barriers and challenges our members face in delivering community-based supports and services to people with disabilities. Chair Casey has been that leader.

Throughout Senator Casey's tenure on this Committee, he has consistently centered the Committee's work on pushing forward policies to uphold the dignity and equality of all people, while focusing on strengthening the supports for both older adults and people with disabilities. Chair Casey's steadfast support for legislation that empowers people with disabilities is evidenced through his leadership in passage of the ABLE Act, a seminal piece of legislation to allow people with disabilities to save without jeopardizing access to services, and advocacy for the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act, the critical relief funding that has sustained home and community-based services (HCBS) in the wake of the pandemic—to name just a few of his accomplishments.

He has also continued to push forward important legislation to strengthen Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) through the introduction of several bills including the Better Care Better Jobs Act, HCBS Access Act, and HCBS Relief Act, as well as legislation to uphold the rights and protections for people with disabilities, such as the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act and the Ensuring Access to Medicaid Buy-In Programs Act. Chair Casey's commitment to ensuring Medicaid services can continue to carry out the promises of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has left an indelible mark on this Congress and on our communities—making them more inclusive for all Americans.

Empowering People with Disabilities in their Communities

As this Committee has acknowledged, the goal of community inclusion is fulfilled through the Medicaid HCBS program and through community providers, who offer a broad range of supports to help people with I/DD live full and independent lives in the community. However, the direct support workforce that enables the supports and services provided through the HCBS program is in crisis. In fact, results from ANCOR's 2024 *The State of America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis* survey found that 90 percent of community providers experienced moderate or severe staffing challenges in the past year. Due to the significant workforce shortages, our survey found that:

- 64% of community providers are delaying the launch of new programs;
- 39% of community providers have discontinued programs and services;
- 57% of case managers are struggling to connect people with services; and
- 57% of community providers deliver services in an area where few or no other options for community-based services exist.

As providers continue to grapple with high turnover and vacancy rates in the direct support workforce and inability to continue the provision of many programs and services, people with I/DD are experiencing diminishing access to community-based services and increased risk of hospitalization or institutionalization.

Congressional Action Is Necessary to Sustain I/DD Services

Given the mounting challenges community providers face in ensuring people with I/DD can continue to access critical community-based services, it is essential that Congress not neglect its role in supporting Medicaid services and strengthening the direct support workforce. We are grateful to the work of this Committee under the leadership from Chair Casey and urge the Committee to continue the important work it has begun to highlight the need for a better long-term care infrastructure, both for older adults and for people with disabilities.

We thank Chair Casey for shining a light on the importance of investing in the Medicaid HCBS program and addressing the ongoing workforce crisis. We urge this Committee to support legislation to strengthen and expand the Medicaid HCBS program through investing in the direct support workforce.

Sincerely,



Barbara Merrill
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ANCOR