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The Honorable Mitch McConnell The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Majority Leader Speaker

United States Senate United States House of Representatives

Washington D.C. 20515 Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer The Honorable Kevin McCarthy

Minority Leader Minority Leader

United States Senate U.S. House of Representatives

Washington D.C., 20515 Washington D.C., 20515

CC: U.S. Members of Congress

March 18, 2020

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy,

As you consider further strategies and interventions through legislation to respond to the ongoing Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, we as non-profit services providers to the one in four Americans living with disability today, including children, adults, veterans and seniors, request your consideration to:

1. **Guarantee Access to Health Care Services, Medications, Medical Supplies, and Related Services at In-Network Rate**

Millions of people with disabilities and older Americans who depend on access to medical services could face severe challenges to health care access due to the strain on the health care system posed by COVID-19. Unlike many Americans, these individuals are particularly vulnerable. Basic restrictions on access could result in unforeseen consequences including preventable institutionalization, hospitalization, or death. Access to medical services is already jeopardized by workforce shortages, and this issue could be further strained should providers in rural or otherwise underserved areas be forced to close or restrict services due to COVID-19. Given this reality, we urge lawmakers to ensure that, for the duration of this public health emergency, individuals with disabilities and older Americans receive services at the in-network rate regardless of where they receive services.

1. **Guarantee Reimbursement for Medical Services Within 30-45 Days**

Access to services is critical for millions of individuals with disabilities and older Americans. Those services are only accessible as long as providers are reimbursed in a timely manner. The workforce that serves this population already experiences high rates of turnover as a result of low wages and continues to be at risk of collapsing in states where the demand for care is growing daily. Maintaining ongoing caseloads while managing additional patients as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic represents an urgent threat to providers and their patients. We urge lawmakers to guarantee that reimbursements for medical services will be paid no later than 30-45 days after furnishing services, consistent with state law.

1. **Strengthen Paid Leave Reimbursement for Families**

With each passing day, there are examples of how this unfolding crisis is impacting employers and the strain this puts on the workforce. We applaud legislators for supporting legislation that ensures certain employers provide employees with 14 days of paid sick leave in instances when they themselves have to quarantine or when they are caring for a loved one. However, changes to the paid family leave provision leave a critical gap for families of individuals with disabilities or those caring for older Americans.

Under the original bill, workers would be covered for 10 weeks if they had been diagnosed, tested, or quarantined for COVID-19, or were caring for an affected family member. Under the current text, the paid family leave provision will still cover 10 weeks, but only if their children’s schools are closed and not for caring for a family member. We are deeply concerned that should a caretaker be unable to work, families would be extremely limited in their ability to fill gaps in care. These provisions must be strengthened moving forward to guarantee that people who are most vulnerable are cared for when caretakers or other health professionals cannot provide care due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

1. **Increase Flexibility and Eligibility for Small Business Loans**

We appreciate the work of the Small Business Administration to provide clarity on available services and resources for small businesses across the country. Given the restrictions put on daily life, small businesses are struggling to pay rent or meet mortgage deadlines while at the same time maintain staff levels that a month ago were nowhere near at risk of constraining. This is uniquely present for non-profit providers. As you consider further stimulus measures, we urge you to consider additional measures for non-profit small businesses to ensure they can continue operating at levels needed to avoid further economic calamity.

1. **Ensure Access to Services and Supports that Keep Vulnerable Populations at Home**

President Trump and his top advisors are urging all Americans to stay home as much as possible to prevent further spread of the outbreak. We fully recognize the urgency of these recommendations but know that for many Americans who depend on various health care services, this is not possible. That said, the federal government and state governments can do more to strengthen services delivered in the home that prevent potential institutionalization. The high-risk of transmission for susceptible populations who depend on home- and community-based services will require the federal government to take action to ensure vulnerable populations can live independently. We urge the federal government to work with state governments and require maximum funding and flexibility to ensure home- and community-based services are strengthened and expanded for the duration of this public health emergency.

As we face the grim reality that this crisis could last for months, we urge you to consider the above proposals to ensure service providers for vulnerable populations can continue meeting the needs of their patients and other beneficiaries. If you have any questions, please contact Connie Garner at CGarner@Easterseals.com.

Sincerely,

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Angela Williams, President and CEO

On Behalf of the Easterseals Affiliate Network

Easterseals National Office

Easterseals Alabama

Easterseals Alaska

Easterseals Arc of Northeast Indiana

Easterseals Arkansas

Easterseals Blake Foundation

Easterseals Cardinal Hill

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Easterseals Central California

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