

Senate COVID-19 Package Impact on IDD Services



Senate COVID-19 Relief Package Includes Key Victories for People with Intellectual, Developmental Disabilities

Despite progress, fourth-round coronavirus response legislation must attend more directly to the needs of community-based disability service providers

WASHINGTON, DC – Late Wednesday, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) Act, a sweeping, \$2.2 trillion COVID-19 response and economic stimulus package that is expected to pass the House of Representatives Friday and be signed into law by President Trump immediately thereafter.

ANCOR applauds three particular CARES Act provisions for their positive impact for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and the providers on whose services they rely. Most notably, **the package codifies "Margie & Isaiah's Law"**—legislation led by ANCOR and introduced by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Rob Portman (R-OH) in late January—to enable disability service providers to be reimbursed by Medicaid for the time direct support professionals spend supporting people with I/DD during short-term hospitalizations.

Another ANCOR-led initiative included in the COVID-19 relief package ensures Medicaid-funded **disability service providers are eligible to apply for federal small business loans**, some of which will be forgiven under provisions of the new law. ANCOR was also grateful for **a short-term reauthorization of funding through November for the Money Follows the Person (MFP)** program, which helps ensure individuals at risk of institutionalization can continue living in community-based settings.

At the same time, there are some ways in which the CARES Act legislation falls short when it comes to directing adequate resources where they can have the most significant impact in protecting the lives of our nation's most vulnerable communities. In particular, **it fails to incorporate legislation introduced by Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) and Representative Debbie Dingell (D-MI) that would have invested significantly in the direct support workforce to strengthen its ability to address the complex needs of people with I/DD.** It **also doesn't specify that the \$100 billion**

appropriated for health care services will include those services delivered through Medicaid-funded Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers, or to those living in Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IID).

Given that the relief package is a significant step in the right direction but leaves out key provisions of Senator Casey and Representative Dingell's legislation—particularly provisions to fund overtime pay and staff stabilization efforts for the direct support workforce—ANCOR will move forward immediately to mobilize advocates to seek further relief for providers of community-based I/DD services. Especially considering the direct support workforce crisis that existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic—characterized by 51 percent turnover rates and 18 to 20 percent vacancy rates—providers need economic resources now more than ever to support retaining and recruiting professionals dedicated to the health and well-being of people with complex support needs.

"We know that at this time of unprecedented need, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have truly stepped up to allocate resources for those with the most significant needs, and we're grateful for the leadership of the Senators who worked tirelessly to ensure the inclusion of measures designed specifically with the needs of people with I/DD and autism in mind," said **Barbara Merrill, chief executive officer for ANCOR**. "We applaud these Senators for taking bold steps to pass this historic, sweeping set of measures in light of the national public health crisis."

Shannon McCracken, vice president of government relations for ANCOR, added, "Now that we are confident the CARES Act will pass the House and be signed into law by the president by the end of this week, [ANCOR] is now turning its attention to ensuring Congress' fourth-round coronavirus response package includes the important provisions that have not yet been passed." Among other provisions, a strong fourth-round package will include economic resources to (1) improve provider organizations' cash flow to ensure they can sustain their operations, (2) prevent the closure of programs or service lines on which people with I/DD rely, and (3) supercharge staff stabilization efforts so providers are better equipped to retain and recruit direct support professionals and ensure the health and well-being of this vital workforce.

"The silver lining in all of this is that we are proving that our advocacy is truly making a difference. Since the beginning of last week, ANCOR has mobilized over 26,000 advocates to send more than 71,000 messages to members of Congress, and we are so proud of how our community of providers has banded together in these toughest of times," McCracken said.

For 50 years, the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ancor.org) has been a leading advocate for the critical role service providers play in enriching the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). As a national nonprofit trade association, ANCOR represents 1,600+ organizations employing more than a half-million professionals who together serve more than a million individuals with I/DD. Our mission is to advance the ability of our members to support people with I/DD to fully participate in their communities.

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