

JOHNSON COUNTY
KANSAS
Developmental Supports

Feb. 17, 2022

To: Rep. Will Carpenter, Chair
Members of the House Committee on Social Services Budget

Re: IDD Workforce Crisis and Waitlist

Thank you for your continued service to our community and your consideration of the systemic issues impacting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We appreciate the opportunity today to provide testimony on the workforce crisis that is hurting IDD service providers and the people we serve.

Johnson County Developmental Supports is the Community Developmental Disabilities Organization for the county. We oversee a network of 2,397 individuals with an intellectual or developmental disability. Of those, 881 are waiting for services. There are 78 providers of Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) in Johnson County that allow these individuals to live in the community rather than in hospitals or institutions.

As a services provider and the CDDO for the county, we see the daily challenges that the network is experiencing, and currently the biggest threat facing the network is the workforce crisis. While IDD service providers were navigating a workforce shortage prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a turnover rate of more than 45%, this shortage has increased greatly due to the pandemic. A survey conducted by the American Network of Community Options and Resources found that a third of direct support professionals are leaving their jobs within the first six months. In a recent report, ANCOR utilized survey data to highlight how staffing shortages are affecting service providers. They found that more than 90% of providers are dealing with the pandemic's impact on recruiting and retention, and 77% are having to turn away new referrals due to staffing shortages. Almost 60% must discontinue programs and services.

The workforce crisis has restricted capacity in Kansas and has made it nearly impossible to meet the growing demands for IDD services. Currently, there is a waitlist in Kansas of more than 4,600 people who need IDD services. While funding for the waitlist is in dire need, there is currently not the capacity to serve all the people who are waiting for services. The most valuable asset in the IDD network is its people – the dedicated workers who provide care. We appreciate the attention the legislature has given to the growing waitlist, but we encourage you not to lose sight of what funding the waitlist means: finding providers with the capacity to serve those individuals. That capacity does not currently exist.

The causes of the workforce crisis are manifold, but the largest issue is financial. Service providers rely on Medicaid reimbursement rates to pay for staff and services for the individuals they support. Reimbursement rates have been woefully low for decades, and while recent increases have had a positive impact on providers' ability to increase wages, it has not been enough to remain competitive.

The greatly appreciated 7% increase included in the budget last year helped us in our recruiting efforts by funding hiring, retention and referral bonuses. But as the wages for most direct care workers in the state hover around \$12/hour, companies in our area can offer upward of \$21/hour to staff with similar education and qualifications. A 30% increase in

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reimbursement rates up would help providers increase wages to \$15/hour to better attract and retain employees. This increase would amount to \$58M in SGF, and it would have a significant and life-long impact for thousands of Kansans.

Additional systemic issues driving the workforce crisis among IDD service providers are the same that many other public and private organizations are dealing with, such as the lack of affordable housing and quality and reliable public transportation. According to an ANCOR survey, the biggest reason direct care staff left the field in 2020 was a fear of COVID-19 (35%), but the second reason was due to a lack of affordable, accessible childcare (25%). The childcare crisis and the workforce crisis are tethered.

In this legislative session, as you work to address the large, systemic issues that are plaguing our state and service providers, we are asking you to include an additional and substantial Medicaid reimbursement rate increase. We must address the years of chronic underfunding if we are to improve this workforce crisis.

We appreciate you taking the time to consider the information provided. To the more than 9,000 residents in Kansas who are eligible for HCBS services on the IDD waiver, your attention to these matters is critical. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with you to address issues impacting our community. We will continue to touch base with our legislators in Johnson County and around the state to ensure you remain informed of our community's needs.

Sincerely,



Chad VonAhnen
Executive Director
Johnson County Developmental Supports