



March 30, 2022

The Honorable Bob Casey
Chair, Senate Special Committee on Aging
G41 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tim Scott
Ranking Member, Senate Special Committee on Aging
628 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Comments for the Record of March 23, 2022, Hearing, “An Economy That Cares: The Importance of Home-Based Care”

Dear Chairman Casey and Ranking Member Scott:

As President and CEO of Lutheran Services in America, I write to you on behalf of the Lutheran Services in America-Disability Network (LSA-DN) that is dedicated to ensuring that people with disabilities have the opportunity to be full participants in their community and live with dignity, respect and independence in the home and community of their choice. LSA-DN is part of Lutheran Services in America which is a national network of 300 Lutheran health and human services organizations that reaches one in 50 people living in America and has combined revenue of over \$23 billion. Lutheran social ministry organizations are deeply embedded in over 1,400 communities in 45 states across the country and have provided services for over 150 years.

As providers of home and community-based services (HCBS), our members know first-hand the importance of these services to millions of people with disabilities and older adults, and that a long-term investment is required to expand access. However, without an equal investment in the workforce that provides these services, our nation will lack the qualified workers needed to provide them to those who need them. The years long HCBS waitlists that plague many states will not be eliminated unless there are enough direct care workers to provide services.

Currently, providers are experiencing the worst workforce shortage we have seen for direct care staff—either prior to or during the height of the pandemic. Many organizations are reducing the number of people they serve or are unable to meet the demand for services because of workforce



shortages. This is particularly a problem in rural communities where some rural programs or providers are closing due to insufficient staffing, exacerbating an already limited set of services in rural areas.

Most older adults and people with disabilities want to live at home, yet many face barriers to accessing the support they need to do so. The HCBS workforce provides vital services, and yet these workers—who are primarily women of color—have been underpaid for decades given the low Medicaid reimbursement rates for these services. Long-standing staffing shortages, which the pandemic exacerbated, have created gaps in service availability, lengthy waiting lists, and additional obstacles to achieving a high quality of life for workers and people with disabilities and their families.

LSA-DN applauds the Senate Aging Committee for holding a hearing to examine the importance of HCBS and for focusing on the needs of the workforce that makes these services possible. However, much more needs to be done. The workforce crisis is impacting every state: it is a national crisis, and thus requires a national solution. That is why LSA-DN calls on every member of the Senate Special Aging Committee to support a significant, long-term, federal investment in HCBS and direct care workforce development.

States have had to rely on relatively small and short-term funding increases to help them address decades long HCBS and workforce issues. But our nation needs an investment of at least **\$250 billion for HCBS and workforce development** if we want to expand these services. An investment in HCBS and the direct care workforce on this level would be transformational and would directly improve the lives of millions of older adults and people with disabilities and the people who care for them.

Fully funding this investment would enable providers to expand services and eliminate the nationwide waitlist of 850,000 older adults and people with disabilities so they can receive needed services in their homes and communities. This would also help address the workforce shortage, for example, through increased wages and benefits for direct care workers. It would provide relief for families and allow millions of family caregivers to return to the paid workforce. It would also enable people to live in their homes and communities and avoid more expensive hospitalization and institutionalization. Finally, it would allow expansion of the Money Follows the Person program and for older adults transitioning from acute care settings to



their homes to receive the services needed to prevent rehospitalization, such as transportation, nutrition, and more.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented our nation a multitude of challenges, it has also presented the opportunity to make an unprecedented investment in the direct care workers who have been the frontline heroes during the pandemic. This essential workforce helps ensure that older adults and people with disabilities can thrive and live with dignity and respect. We urge every member of the Aging Committee and Congress to show their commitment to HCBS and the direct care workforce by providing at least \$250 billion in funding.

Thank you for your consideration. If LSA-DN can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Josh Dubensky at jdubensky@lutheranservices.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte Haberaecker".

Charlotte Haberaecker
President and CEO