



January 23, 2019

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warren:

On Monday, we celebrated the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the 90th anniversary of his birth, and we reflected on his commitment to serving those at risk and needing support. Dr. King considered representative government as part of the solution for those in need – yet, today, the government shutdown and inability to seek compromise is, in fact, the most immediate problem for many in America.

With that in mind, the Providers' Council – Massachusetts' largest association of community-based health and human services organizations – urges you to work with the Administration and legislative leaders in Washington D.C. to immediately reopen the federal government and limit the harm your constituents are already experiencing in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts residents fill nearly 180,000 jobs in the community-based human services sector, caring for one-in-ten state residents. We provide essential supports for individuals with disabilities; those with mental health and/or substance abuse issues; survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence or exploitation; our veterans; the elderly; individuals experiencing homelessness; and many more. Our recent report, *The Face of the Human Services Sector*, detailed that one-in-eight human services workers are living below 150 percent of the federal poverty level, and one-third of households with at least one human service worker are housing burdened or severely burdened.

Many of our members have already been reporting a significant impact due to the federal government shutdown. Just some of these include:

- Organizations that help individuals with disabilities secure jobs cleaning federal buildings and sites in Boston, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the John F. Kennedy Library, the Charlestown Navy Yard, Longfellow House, Olmstead National Historic Site and more. ***These individuals with disabilities are now out of work – and not receiving a paycheck.***
- Human services organizations providing re-entry services to the Bureau of Prisons are being told they must continue providing services, but they will not receive payment until the federal government reopens.
- Several providers have noted that property acquisitions expected under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are being delayed or held up due to the government closure. As they are unable to acquire property, these organizations are not able to open new programs to help Massachusetts residents in need.

- While federal departments including the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) have remained open and are processing invoices, the situation is tenuous at best. The departments had been expected to close on Friday, January 18, though we are learning that date has been extended until March 1. We are concerned that a prolonged shutdown could impact programs that assist survivors of domestic violence in Massachusetts, and if these departments stop processing invoices, federal funds may become inaccessible.
- Many individuals served by the human services sector depend on federal government programs, including SNAP, WIC, school lunches, Section 8 and other subsidized housing programs. As one member puts it:

"All it takes is one missed payment, voucher or rental subsidy to put them at extreme risk. It is imperative that those who are the most frail and vulnerable are not held hostage to a system that is meant to be a safety net for them. This is a most cruel and unusual way to force policy change:"

While there are already very serious impacts from the shutdown, we anticipate an increase in those seeking services from the community-based sector in the event of a prolonged shutdown, further straining our already limited resources. As we noted earlier, many of the workers in the community-based human services sector may also qualify for food stamps, child care vouchers or HUD subsidies themselves, and any further delay to processing these at the federal level also has the potential to not just impact the clients we serve – but our workforce as well. Further, this low-paid workforce has no assurances that any pay missed will be restored when the shutdown ends.

We urge you to share these concerns with your colleagues in the House and Senate, as well as the Administration. We ask you to acknowledge the urgency of this crisis, and immediately and completely reopen government, releasing pay to the thousands of contracted employees and restoring benefits and services to those in need. Please advise them that our sector cares for one-in-ten residents in the Commonwealth, and we need the federal government to reopen and support Massachusetts' most vulnerable residents who are already facing significant challenges. The Council and our members would be willing to discuss any of these issues with you at your convenience, and we appreciate your support of the clients in our care, our dedicated staff and the overall human services sector.

Sincerely yours,



Michael Weekes
President/CEO