



November 15, 2021

To: Senate President Karen E. Spilka
Speaker of the House Ronald Mariano
Chairman Michael J. Rodrigues, Senate Committee on Ways & Means
Chairman Aaron M. Michlewitz, House Committee on Ways & Means

Re: Letter in support of Line Item 1599-2027 in the Senate version of the American Rescue Plan Act spending plan

Dear Senate President Spilka, House Speaker Mariano, Chairman Rodrigues and Chairman Michlewitz:

As you begin your Conference Committee deliberations on the state's American Rescue Plan Act spending plan, **we urge you to support line item 1599-2027 in the Senate version of the bill**, which includes a reserve to support loan repayment, retention and recruitment programs for human services workers in the Commonwealth.

Community-based human services workers fill more than 180,000 jobs in the Commonwealth and serve one-in-ten residents on behalf of the state. While many individuals were able to work from home during the pandemic, these direct support professionals remained on the front lines. Many of them even volunteered to quarantine in homes and shelters with COVID-positive consumers, ensuring those who depend on critical care would still receive the essential supports they needed.

The sector, however, is in a workforce crisis. While other industries can raise the price of a cheeseburger or the cost of a cup of coffee to increase revenue and pay employees more, human services organizations work on fixed state contracts. Recent model budgets created by EOHHS benchmarked direct care salaries in the human services sector to a median wage of just \$16.79 an hour. Amazon announced in September it would pay new hires \$18 an hour, while Costco announced just weeks ago that its new hires would make \$17 an hour.

Our chief competitor, however, remains the Commonwealth itself, which purchases services from the community-based human services sector and also chooses to provide some services itself. Salaries for state jobs in human services far eclipse similar jobs in the community. Just last week, we pulled Q1 2021 Employment and Wages information (ES-202 data) from mass.gov, and it noted the state pays average weekly wages of \$1,274 to employees in the individual and family services area, while the community-based human services sector can only pay employees doing similar work an average weekly wage of \$548. **This is a pay gap of more than 130 percent – an insurmountable challenge for us to recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce.**

Providers' Council

Letter in support of line item 1599-2027 in the Senate version of the ARPA spending plan

Line item 1599-2027 in the Senate APRA bill would help this community-based human services workforce in two ways. Not less than \$30 million would be allocated to **create a student loan repayment program for human services workers** who work in programs funded by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Early Education and Care. An additional \$25 million would **create a grant program designed to help human services organizations recruit and retain workers**.

While loan repayment programs have been instituted for various other groups or proposed elsewhere in ARPA spending plans, none of them fully address the essential human services workforce. The plan contained at line item 1599-2027 in the Senate ARPA bill would include community-based direct care workers who deliver critical care on the front lines every day to one-in-ten Massachusetts residents.

We believe these initiatives would greatly help the human services sector with its immediate recruitment and retention challenges as we work expeditiously with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to solve the systemic funding challenges that are in danger of jeopardizing essential services being provided to our state's residents. By creating a student loan repayment incentive and funding other retention initiatives, this line item would go a long way to ensuring critical care and safety for residents already receiving services. We hope it would also increase recruitment so that our members can open additional beds or create more program slots to move potential clients off waiting lists and help them actively receive the support they need.

In closing, ***we urge you to support language at line item 1599-2027 in the Senate's ARPA spending plan.*** We appreciate the Legislature's historic support of the human services sector, and on behalf of the workers who fill more than 180,000 jobs in our sector, thank you for your positive consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Michael Weekes
President/CEO
Providers' Council

cc: Chairman Adam Gomez, Joint Committee on Children, Families & Persons with Disabilities
Chairman Michael Finn, Joint Committee on Children, Families & Persons with Disabilities