



February 28, 2025

The Honorable Ronald Mariano  
Speaker of the House  
State House, Room 356  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We are writing on behalf of *The Collaborative*, composed of the Association for Behavioral Healthcare (ABH), the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers (ADDP), the Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) and the Providers' Council.

Our joint membership provides critical safety net services to hundreds of thousands of residents across the Commonwealth. These include people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and brain injuries; behavioral health needs including mental health and substance use disorders; those experiencing extreme poverty, homelessness, housing insecurity, and food instability; vocational rehabilitation and justice-involved individuals; and children, adults, and families in need of care, support, and protection from violence or abuse. The human services sector encompasses more than 160,000 jobs and is essential to the social infrastructure of the Commonwealth.

We recognize that the Commonwealth is facing a challenging fiscal situation. However, providing adequate funding for human services staff is a statutory requirement under Chapter 257 of the Acts of 2008, and it should be treated in the same fashion as collective bargaining requirements or other contractual obligations.

**We request that the Commonwealth continue to work towards adequate wages for the human services workforce.** Our goal continues to be that EOHHS establish salary benchmarks for job titles based on the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the applicable wage reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This change is essential because the current methodology for setting rates lags inflation and does not adequately reflect the market salaries for the vital work performed by employees in our sector.

Recently, the Commonwealth raised salary benchmarks above the median state-specific BLS benchmarks, which had been the standard for many years, to the 53<sup>rd</sup> percentile to better reflect market values. Last year, the wages of direct care staff were further increased to the 63<sup>rd</sup> percentile. This was a particularly important step towards setting competitive wages for these lower-paid staff positions. However, this year's benchmarks proposed lowering direct care wages back to the 53<sup>rd</sup> percentile. Such a move would represent a significant setback to our ability to attract and retain these critical workers.

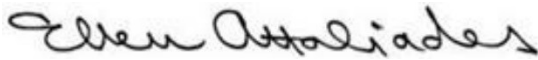
As an interim step to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile, we strongly urge you **to reinstate using the 63<sup>rd</sup> percentile for direct care staff in your FY '26 budget proposal.** That important achievement should not be abandoned. Additionally, we advocate for **increasing all human services wages to that 63<sup>rd</sup> percentile benchmark** using the latest BLS wage data. Wages for clinical and nursing positions are in urgent need of adjustment, but rates for all positions need to be increased over time. To this end, **we ask you to increase line item 1599-6903, the Chapter 257 Reserve, to \$307 million in your FY '26 budget proposal.** In addition, the line-item language should clearly require that the 63<sup>rd</sup> percentile of the current BLS wages should be used as a benchmark.

The human services sector's ability to recruit and retain qualified workers is essential to providing the care upon which so many of our neighbors rely. Inadequate wages lead to high turnover and difficulty filling critical positions. Recent surveys have shown vacancy rates in the sector as high as 30 percent or more for certain positions. These shortages are especially acute for direct care and clinician roles. Wage rates for clinicians, as just one example, continue to fall far short of market salaries, and as a result, these positions have some of the highest vacancies in the Commonwealth.

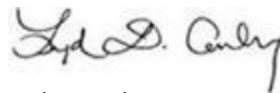
The primary solution to this dilemma is clear – wages for human services workers providing critical safety net services should be based on the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the state-specific BLS data. A well-trained, educated workforce that can provide consistent, quality care will strengthen Massachusetts and allow us to ensure our friends, family and neighbors are safe and supported. Addressing wage disparities in the human services sector is also a social justice issue. The human service workforce is disproportionately comprised of women and people of color, and the Commonwealth should compensate these employees equitably.

We appreciate your consideration of this request, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Ellen Attaliades  
President/CEO  
Association of Developmental  
Disabilities Providers



Lydia Conley  
President/CEO  
Association for Behavioral  
Healthcare



Rachel Gwaltney  
Executive Director  
Children's League of Massachusetts



Bill Yelenak  
President/CEO  
Providers' Council

cc: The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means