



June 12, 2020

To: Senator Patricia D. Jehlen, Chair
Representative Stephan Hay, Vice Chair
Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development

From: Michael Weekes, President/CEO

Re: Testimony in support of the concept of House 4745, *An Act providing hazard pay for essential workers in the COVID-19 emergency*

Chairwoman Jehlen, Vice Chairman Hay and members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the concept of House Bill 4745, legislation that would provide additional funding to essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Providers' Council is the state's largest association of community-based health and human services organizations, nearly all of which are nonprofits. Our sector contains more than 180,000 jobs and the dedicated direct care workers in this field have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing essential services to one-in-ten state residents. While many other sectors have been able to transition to remote work, a large percentage of our workforce remains on the job, as they are helping clients and consumers in congregate care settings.

We cannot speak highly enough of the job the community-based direct care workforce has done in the face of this pandemic. Direct care staff have spent countless hours working around the clock with clients in congregate care settings. Some staff working in the sector have volunteered to live at the congregate care settings where they work when there is a diagnosed Coronavirus case so they can continue to serve clients and not bring the disease home to their families. We see heroes in our sector every day – those who are putting others before themselves and are certainly deserving of additional pay.

We thank Representative Robinson for introducing this legislation which would pay employees 150 percent of their actual earnings for any day they are required to work outside their home. ***The Providers' Council supports this legislation in concept***; the Council has long supported increased wages for human services workers, and we provided data to EOHHS and the Baker administration that led to them providing an additional \$139 million for human services programs, with funding going toward staff wages, infection control, personal protective equipment (PPE) and other staff supports. It is essential

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that our sector – which was in a workforce crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Massachusetts in March – can pay employees doing this complex work a fair wage.

We are concerned, however, that this bill, as currently written, does not include any funding mechanism. As currently drafted, this bill represents an unfunded mandate for community-based human services nonprofits that hold purchase-of-service contracts with the state to provide care to residents on its behalf. Without additional funding from the state, human services programs that receive a majority of their funding from the Commonwealth and/or federal government would be unable to pay increased wages.

Last week, we provided testimony before this committee about mounting unemployment costs for human services nonprofits that self-insure and have had to make difficult decisions about laying off or furloughing staff during this global crisis. However, mandating these organizations to pay employees 150 percent of their normal wages so that they may continue providing essential services on behalf of the Commonwealth during a pandemic would further endanger many of these nonprofits' business operations, and, in turn, the residents who depend on this sector to provide them critical care without more state funding. They must receive additional contracted funding support.

We support the concept of this legislation; we are urging the Administration and Legislature to continue compensating community-based human services workers at a higher rate of pay during this pandemic. The additional compensation that they have currently been receiving is set to end on June 30 as the state enters a new fiscal year, and we grow increasingly concerned at what will happen to our field when that funding runs out. There will certainly be a negative impact on morale, and we expect employees may need to leave our field to seek other employment opportunities so they can continue providing for their family. We must ensure human services organizations are able to recruit and retain high quality workers to serve our state's most vulnerable residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House 4745. Again, ***we support this legislation in concept, but we insist the Legislature provide funding for it*** as community-based nonprofits cannot divert funding from their missions to increase pay. We look forward to discussing how the Administration and Legislature can help community-based nonprofit organizations ensure our workers – who are on the front lines of this global pandemic – are able to continue receiving an increased rate of pay to provide these essential services after funding in the current fiscal year ends in just more than two weeks. Thank you for your positive consideration of this legislation and additional funding that you can provide to community-based human services organizations to pay higher salaries to direct care workers.