



December 23, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leaders:

Re: Economic Recovery legislation

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is writing to urge you to include the following in the Economic Recovery legislation which Congress will consider in early January. People with disabilities are among our nation's poorest citizens and like all Americans, are experiencing the impact of the economic recession. We appreciate that the purpose of the Economic Recovery legislation is designed to stimulate the economy by creating jobs and believe that each of the following proposals meet that criteria.

Medicaid – Providing Fiscal Relief to States:

Medicaid is the largest funder of health and long term services and supports for children and adults with disabilities. Due to the economic downturn, a significant number of programs that serve these populations have been cut in recent months and additional cuts are expected in the future. According to a December 10, 2008 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report, 37 states are facing mid-year 2009 budget shortfalls.¹ Such budget gaps will result in additional loss of jobs for health care and other workers providing Medicaid services. Therefore we strongly urge Congress to increase the federal government's share of Medicaid spending (known as the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage or FMAP) by \$125 billion over 2 years.

¹ McNichol, Elizabeth and Lav, Iris, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (December 10, 2008): *State Budget Troubles Worsen*.

Congress should explicitly condition increased federal Medicaid funds to the states on a requirement that states maintain their current efforts in serving the needs of beneficiaries. States should not be permitted to allocate increased FMAP funds to other non-Medicaid programs. Therefore, we strongly urge you to require that states maintain program/benefit levels and current eligibility for coverage as a condition of increased FMAP funding.

In addition to a broad FMAP increase with maintenance of effort, we urge you to include a \$5 – \$10 billion FMAP increase over two years targeted towards Medicaid *home and community based services*. This targeted increase would act as an incentive for states to restore and create new jobs for direct support professionals and address unmet needs of individuals with disabilities for community-based services and supports, rather than institutionally based care. Over a two-year period, a \$5 billion commitment to address the support needs of persons with disabilities currently awaiting services could create an estimated 122,000 new full-time jobs to meet the needs of 120,000 to 400,000 Americans with disabilities needing home and community supports.²

Employment:

The economic recovery plan must increase the employment rate of people with disabilities. The Obama-Biden Administration plan includes a priority for increasing the employment rate of workers with disabilities by effectively implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibits discrimination and requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed \$10,000 to take affirmative action to hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. CCD urges Congress to encourage the new Administration to aggressively enforce this provision.

CCD calls upon Congress to significantly invest in vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs that will create jobs for people who provide employment supports to people with disabilities, will lead to jobs for people with significant disabilities and will invest in the success of youth with disabilities. We recommend that the state match be waived for the period of this additional investment. Specifically we call upon Congress and the incoming Administration to invest a minimum of \$500 million over the next two years in VR in the following targeted manner:

- \$250 million to the VR state grant program specifically targeted to improve services to youth who are transitioning from special education to work and community life;
- \$150 million to the VR state grant program to increase the number of persons with significant disabilities served, including disabled veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan;
- \$50 million to the Supported Employment State Grant program; and
- \$50 million to the Projects with Industry program to ensure that people with the most significant disabilities are helped in the economic recovery.

² Estimates concerning impact of FMAP for home and community-based services on direct support professional workforce provided by the Research and Training Center on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Housing:

As the National Low Income Housing Coalition underscored in its Economic Recovery proposal, “[T]he construction of each new multi-family rental unit produces 1.16 new jobs and every \$100,000 spent on home remodeling produces 1.11 new jobs”³. People with disabilities, who, on a national average, are at 18% of area median income,⁴ have faced a severe housing crisis for years due to the lack of affordable and accessible units across the country. Therefore we strongly urge Congress to capitalize the new National Housing Trust Fund at \$10 billion for two years to build or rehabilitate 100,000 rental homes for the lowest income households.

Education:

There is a dire need, particularly in large and older cities, to renovate public school buildings, many of which are close to being deemed unsafe. The renovation of such schools should be made a priority under the employment related provisions of the next stimulus package. Local governments simply do not have the tax base to undertake these large infrastructure expenditures. One vital element of any school renovation must be to assure that all such school buildings are made accessible for students with disabilities. Such renovations could include ramps, stair removal, elevators and other mechanisms to provide full access to students with disabilities. At least \$3 billion should be allocated for such accessibility features.

In addition, we urge Congress to provide at least \$700 million for the Part C, Early Intervention program and the Section 619, preschool grants program of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Part C and Section 619 have not seen any increases in nearly a decade. Because the number of children identified as eligible has grown by nearly 70 percent in the Part C program alone, states have had to narrow their eligibility criteria, limit the scope and duration of services and impose cost-sharing on parents. According to States this increase will result in their ability to immediately hire at least 10,000 desperately needed direct services staff and case managers, many of whom would likely be women.

Social Security:

The Social Security Administration (SSA) must replace its aging National Computer Center facility and fund new IT equipment. The current center is nearly 30 years old and can no longer fully support SSA’s mission. Most of SSA’s computer system is based on 1950s technology. In addition, its mechanical and engineering systems are quickly nearing the end of their useful lives. SSA’s ability to keep up with new workloads and increasing volumes of cases is severely limited. The economic recovery package should provide \$750 million in funding for replacement of the Social Security Administration’s National Computer Center and IT equipment. This would allow annually appropriated funds to be dedicated to the day-to-day functioning of the agency.

³ Fei Liu, H. and Emrath, P. (2008, October 7). *The Direct Impact of Home Building and Remodeling on the U.S. Economy*. u Washington, DC: National Association of Home Builders. <http://www.nahb.org/generic.aspx?genericContentID=103543>. u

⁴ O’Hara, Ann, et al, (2007, April), *Priced Out in 2006: The Housing Crisis for People with Disabilities*, a joint publication of the Technical Assistance Collaborative and the CCD Housing Task Force: <http://tacinc.org/Pubs/PricedOut.htm>.

Research:

Investment in scientific discovery is crucial to improve the nation's health and economy in both the near and long-term future. In recent years, research at the National Institutes of Health has slowed due to budgets that have not kept pace with biomedical inflation. Capacity and infrastructure to conduct research at the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRCs) funded through the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has been weakened due to budget cuts. According to a recent study by Families USA, every dollar of NIH funding generated more than twice as much in state economic output. NIH grants and contracts create and support more than 350,000 jobs that generate wages in excess of \$18 billion in the 50 states. We urge Congress to include at least \$1 billion in NIH funding in any immediate economic-stimulus effort, and include this funding in the base for subsequent budget years.

Conclusion:

The above funding requests align very well with the purpose of the Economic Recovery legislation, and their effects will be far-reaching. In addition to supporting our nation's poorest citizens disproportionately affected by the current economic downturn, these targeted FMAP and other increases will simultaneously promote job retention, job creation, and stimulate the economy. Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to all Americans and their families – those with and without disabilities. With your support, America's communities will remain strong, healthy, and ready to work and learn.

If you have any questions, please contact, Liz Savage, The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy Disability Policy Collaboration, 202-783-2229 (savage@thedpc.org).

Sincerely,

ACCSES

American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
American Association on Health and Disability
American Association on People with Disabilities
American Foundation for the Blind
American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Network of Community Options and Resources
American Occupational Therapy Association
APSE: The Network on Employment
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism Speaks
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Center for Disability Issues & the Health Profession

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Council for Exceptional Children
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
Helen Keller National Center
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association
Institute for Educational Leadership
Inter-National Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Lutheran Services in America
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Disability Representatives
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services
National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Industries for the Blind
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives
National Rehabilitation Association
National Respite Coalition
NISH
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America
School Social Work Association of America
The Arc of the United States
The National Center for Learning Disabilities
Title II Community AIDS National Network
United Cerebral Palsy
United Jewish Communities
United Spinal Association
World Institute on Disability