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August 12, 2021

To the members of the New York State Congressional Delegation,

Voluntary providers of supports and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are facing a critical workforce shortage, which needs immediate action by our federal representatives. In particular, as the budget reconciliation process moves forward, we ask that you fully endorse the inclusion of the Better Care Better Jobs Act (BCBJA) and ensure that the proposed \$400 billion investment in home and community based services (HCBS) remains intact. The BCBJA will help pave the way for much needed resources for the direct care workforce and beyond. Having a permanent 10 percentage point increase in the federal Medicaid match for delivering HCBS in addition to funding for improvements and innovation would be life changing.

The Arc New York is a family-led organization that advocates and provides supports and services to people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities, emphasizing person-centered choice and community engagement. With 37 operating Chapters across New York state, our organization is the largest voluntary provider in New York state, supporting more than 60,000 individuals and families and employing more than 35,000 people. Medicaid funds 90% of the supports non-profits like The Arc New York provide.

For decades, investment in HCBS has not kept pace with rising costs and private-sector competition. The repercussions from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are being felt as providers of HCBS face a severe shortage of Direct Support Professionals (DSP) and few additional resources by which to recruit and retain staff. A recent survey conducted by New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) found that 25% of DSP positions are currently vacant statewide – a 75% increase in vacancy rates since pre-pandemic levels. 93% percent of providers saw a decrease in job applicants this year, and 48% of providers were forced to close or reduce programs due to lack of staff. This is not just a looming crisis; it is an emergency that endangers our most fundamental responsibility to provide supports and services to vulnerable populations.

DSPs are essential workers who provide daily care, services and supports to people with I/DD 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These workers – the majority of whom are women – have been underpaid and undervalued for too long. The average lowest starting wage for a DSP in our group homes is \$13.73 statewide, which is far lower than even the most basic entry-level position in other industries. Caring for

people with complex needs is a rewarding yet challenging job, which requires ongoing training, high-level of responsibility, and skill. Their pay must be commensurate with the work they provide. This cannot be accomplished unless we have strong government leaders to advocate on their behalf.

For these reasons we are asking you to support the Better Care Better Jobs Act (BCBJA). This is a once in a generation chance to create the care economy infrastructure that New Yorkers need, while providing increased wages, career ladders, and opportunities for DSPs, who are the backbone of the system of supports and services that people with I/DD and their families depend on.

We look forward to working with you further on this and other policies that benefit people across the state. Should you have any questions or require additional information, we are here to assist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erik Geizer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Erik Geizer  
Chief Executive Officer