
The American Jobs Plan

President Biden has outlined a major infrastructure policy initiative that the Congress will be considering in the months ahead. While the details have not been filled in yet, the White House fact sheet for the plan says it will address the “infrastructure of our care economy by creating jobs and raising wages and benefits for essential home care workers.” It also calls for providing home and community-based care for individuals on the waiting lists. As this legislation will affect the lives of our family members with I/DD and the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who attend to their daily and long-term care, we encourage President Biden and the Congress to consider our concerns about protecting individuals with the most severe disabilities as you craft legislation.

The plan envisions making significant changes in the structure of the DSP workforce. Today’s DSPs too often face minimum wage salaries and receive little recognition for their important work. As a result, they are undertrained, must work multiple jobs to make ends meet and move on to higher paying fields frequently. The system is harmful for the residents who need quality care. We hope the plan will provide DSPs with salaries and benefits commensurate with those received by other health care professionals, and that it will contain provisions for education and training to encourage workers to look upon this position as a career.

Unfortunately, the plan as described would divide developmental care services into two silos, one for HCBS’s and one for ICFs, and provide funding only for the former. It would add \$400 billion in federal funds for HCBS services only. Some advocates for this position argue that this approach is needed to overcome an institutional bias, i.e., that the ICF program is mandatory while the HCBS program is optional. It is a distinction without a difference. Fifty states have ICFs while 47 have HCBS’s. Advocates who favor more funds for the HCBS program alone ignore the fact that the federal government spends about five times as much on HCBS waiver programs as on ICFs. More importantly, the same workforce works in ICFs as in HCBS group homes and each need higher salaries, better education and a career path.

We ask simply that this initiative be about the individuals with special needs and the people who provide care. It should not choose one form of care over another. The form of care should be determined by the needs of the individual and their choice among the widest possible range of services available to meet their needs and desires, not by the ideology of some. We ask that the \$400 billion in federal fund include comparable funding for ICF services and employees as well as for HCBS