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Achieve with us.

Brian Cusack
President

Maura Sullivan, MPA
Chief Executive Officer

*For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities*

Governor Maura Healey
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

October 28, 2025

Dear Governor Healey:

Thank you for your work on the many critical matters before you. There are multiple, deeply concerning challenges facing the nation and the Commonwealth, yet we continue to feel grateful to live in Massachusetts. This state continues to lead by its values despite the challenges before it. We write to you today to share the priorities of The Arc of Massachusetts, as your administration prepares the fiscal year 2027 state budget.

As you know, The Arc of Massachusetts is the state's leading advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including autism, and their families. We represent and advocate for over 250,000 people statewide. Our community is deeply concerned about the impacts of federal policies, initiatives, and significant funding cuts. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with your administration to prioritize the most vulnerable. The disability community intersects with every other marginalized identity—we are Black and brown, immigrants, low-income, LGBTQIA+, and we face increasing challenges with compounding levels of marginalization. Adults with disabilities are especially struggling in this current moment and need the support of our Commonwealth more than ever.

Our top priority for nearly a decade has been the significant and ongoing workforce crisis, which will be worsened by current federal actions. For years, the human services sector has been stuck in a recruitment and retention crisis due in part to low rates of pay as established by Chapter 257. The Chapter 257 rates are currently tied to the 53rd percentile of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), translating to an average of \$20/hour for direct care staff. This is not a livable wage, particularly in a high cost-of-living state such as MA.

Many providers report that their staff are forced to work multiple jobs simply to make ends meet. Providers often must tap into their own budgets to subsidize salaries, paying above the established Chapter 257 rate simply so that they can hire qualified staff. This is not sustainable for providers, especially when considering rising program costs, growing health care costs, and other market pressures. While our long-term goal is to raise Chapter 257 to the 75th percentile, **we urge you to maintain the 53rd percentile for FY27. Without momentum on these rates, the impact on our community will be utterly devastating.**

This workforce crisis results in thousands of people being stuck on waiting lists for services. The people on these lists are often left underserved or completely unserved, waiting at home for services. This puts stress and strain on the individual, who is often isolated, losing skills, or ending up in the emergency department, and on families who often cannot work or attend to their own needs while their loved ones wait for an appropriate placement. People with complex needs who require one-to-one support are often the most impacted by workforce vacancies. Frequently, The Arc hears from families who are in this situation—it is a heartbreakingly common challenge with true consequences.

Importantly, a significant percentage of the human service workforce is made up of immigrants—providers report anywhere from 10-40% of their workforce are at risk of deportation given the current federal actions. With Temporary Protected Status authorizations, specifically for Haiti, set to expire this winter, we stand to face a further shrinking workforce that will only make this tenuous situation worse. The immigration pipeline is no longer a hopeful option for the growth of our workforce. These human services workers have been essential members of our community and are now at risk.

There are other significant challenges facing the disability community. The reconciliation bill signed into law in July by the President made devastating cuts to Medicaid, SNAP, and other services that are vital to our community. We acknowledge that this law will force states like Massachusetts to make difficult decisions about funding and eligibility. Our immediate concern is focused on the **downstream impacts of federal reimbursement cuts and state budget tightening on Medicaid-funded long-term services and supports (LTSS)** that will exacerbate existing crises. We are particularly focused on the services that support the most vulnerable in our communities—day habilitation programs, Adult Foster Care (AFC) and PCA programs. Even small cuts to these services would be catastrophic. Longer term, we are concerned about people with IDD and autism **losing eligibility for services through redeterminations and work requirements**, depending on how individuals with autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities are categorized.

All of the above challenges in our current landscape have created a perfect storm. This community is growing in size and acuity, and on average has higher support needs. They and their families need access to care, more support in the home and community, and more flexibility when underserved. But simultaneously, we stand to face cuts due to dangerous federal policies that will cause the state budget to constrict, and a shrinking workforce.

This storm will jeopardize the progress made by the disability community over the past decades. Powered by the stories of families who fought for an alternative to institutionalization for their loved ones, our service system moved to home and community-based models. These are the programs that allow individuals to live meaningful lives in their communities with support. We cannot move backwards towards dehumanizing institutional settings that warehoused people. Given the current challenges and the stakes of this moment, we support efforts by your administration and the legislature to consider all possible strategies, including raising revenues and responsibly tapping into the rainy day fund to ensure that we continue to care for the most vulnerable in our communities.

Since January, The Arc of Massachusetts has collected hundreds of stories and concerns from our community about the stakes of this moment. Here are just two examples:

“As a full-time caregiver to my autistic daughter, these supports and services are not just helpful—they are essential. [With the] federal cuts...my family will face devastating challenges.”

“My daughter...relies on therapies and programs that help her grow, communicate, and navigate the world. Without them, she would lose critical developmental progress, and I would be left without the resources needed to support her properly.”

We know that these are the most difficult times, and we look forward to working collaboratively and creatively with you to fortify our service system for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. Massachusetts leads the country by valuing all —now is the time to double-down and bolster a system that leaves no one behind. You have a partner in The Arc in this work.

Thank you for your leadership and for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maura Sullivan". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Maura Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer
The Arc of Massachusetts

cc:

Dr. Kiame Mahaniah, Secretary of Health and Human Services

Mary McGeown, Undersecretary for Human Services

Michael Levine, Undersecretary for MassHealth

Sarah Peterson, Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services