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Achieve with us.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Brian Cusack
President

Maura Sullivan, MPA
Chief Executive Officer

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

November 9, 2026

Dear Governor Healey:

Congratulations on your recent re-election and thank you for your work on the many critical matters before you. We continue to appreciate the dedicated work of your administration, particularly in these deeply challenging times. Massachusetts, under your leadership, continues to lead the nation in respecting and supporting people with disabilities and their families, and we look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with you.

We are particularly grateful that recently, you signed onto the letter along with 17 Governors from across the country to reaffirm your commitment to the *Olmstead* precedent and home and community-based services, in spite of the Department of Justice's deeply concerning memo abandoning enforcement. This was monumental to our community. Despite that strong commitment, we do recognize that there will be very real and challenging fiscal pressures on long term supports and services in the coming years.

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. The Arc has a unique 360-degree lens, where we focus on advocacy for individuals and families and are also informed by our 17 chapters across the state, who are providing direct services every day. Our entire community continues to experience deep concerns regarding, and very real impacts from, federal funding cuts, policies, and rhetoric. As a significantly marginalized community, adults with disabilities are struggling in this current moment and need the support of our Commonwealth more than ever. We write to you today to share the priorities of The Arc of Massachusetts, as your administration prepares the fiscal year 2028 state budget.

Uplifting the Human Services Workforce

Over the past decade, our top priority has been supporting the human services workforce—a vital group of dedicated staff that has been stuck in a structural, consistent workforce crisis. This crisis is due in part to low rates of pay as established by Chapter 257 and was made even worse this past year due to the revocation of Temporary Protected Status for Haitians—a significant part of our workforce. The TPS revocation had devastating impacts on individuals, families, communities, providers, and this already-struggling workforce.

Presently, Chapter 257 rates are tied to the 53rd percentile of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), translating to an average of $22.49/hour for direct care staff. This is not a livable wage, particularly in Massachusetts. According to the MIT Livable Wage Calculator, in Middlesex County a single adult with one child needs $63.43 per hour to make ends meet.

Providers report that staff are forced to work multiple jobs and rely on housing benefits and food assistance—a reality made worse by recent SNAP and other benefit cuts. Some providers tap into their own budgets to subsidize salaries to pay above the established benchmark, to ensure that they can hire qualified staff. However, this is not sustainable for providers, and deeply inequitable given that not all providers are able to do this. Rising program costs, rapidly growing health care costs, and other fiscal pressures have made this an untenable situation.

In addition to the impact on staff, the 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 profound autism and higher acuity who require one-to-one support are often the most impacted by workforce vacancies.

Aligned with our partners at ADDP, the Provider's Council, and others, our long-term goal is to raise Chapter 257 rates to the 75th percentile of the BLS. **Recognizing the current pressures, for FY28 we request an increase in rates to meet the 63rd percentile.** This would put average rates at $24.08/hour. This would continue the successful investments your administration has made in recent years that have shortened waitlists. If we can continue this momentum, we will see more successful recruitment and retention, and subsequently shorter waitlists for access to services.

We cannot afford to overlook investment in this vital field. The risks of underinvestment far outweigh the costs, and prioritizing our workforce now will yield significant long-term savings.

Protecting Home and Community-Based Services through Medicaid and DDS

We appreciate your administration’s ongoing commitment to protecting Medicaid and its services. The threats to Home and Community-Based services over the past year and a half have been deeply

concerning—from the OB3 funding cuts and eligibility changes to the attacks on *Olmstead*—and we are grateful for all of the work your administration has done to clearly communicate the Commonwealth's commitments and values.

We acknowledge that the state budget is where our Commonwealth will feel the most acute impacts of federal changes, and we urge you to prioritize funding for home and community-based services and long-term supports and services. These vital DDS and MassHealth programs ensure that people with disabilities can succeed in their own communities, and not be forced into institutions or more restrictive, and more expensive, settings.

The Arc was founded by parents who wanted an alternative to institutionalization for their loved ones, and we have come so far to create that reality. But the current perfect storm—growing number of individuals with IDD and autism, growing support needs, all while the federal government abandons its responsibility and forces deep cuts on states—is deeply concerning. **We urge Massachusetts to stand strong and protect DDS services as well as personal care attendants (PCA), day habilitation, adult family care, and more in the coming budget cycles. Cuts to these services push family caregivers beyond their physical, emotional and financial limits, to provide unpaid, around the clock care with zero relief, zero breaks and no end in sight.**

As the parent of two young adults with profound autism and intellectual disability, I know firsthand that state services are not just budget line items—they are lifelines. Our state budget is a reflection of our Commonwealth's core values, and our community strongly supports the revenue solutions required to sustain these essential programs. I urge you to prioritize the autism and IDD community as you finalize your FY28 budget recommendations.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with your administration. Thank you for your leadership and for your continued support.

Sincerely,



Maura Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer | The Arc of Massachusetts

cc:

Dr. Kiame Mahaniah, Secretary of Health and Human Services
Allison Bovell-Ammon, Acting Undersecretary for Health and Human Services
Ryan Schwarz, Undersecretary for MassHealth
Sarah Peterson, Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services