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TO: Senate Ways & Means Committee

FROM: Lori B. Feldkamp, Big Lakes President & CEO

DATE: March 7, 2017

RE: SB 173 –Reimbursement Rates for I/DD Providers

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for SB173. Passage of this bill is crucial for sustaining a system of quality supports and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

For 44 years, Big Lakes has provided services for individuals with intellectual disabilities that enable them to live and work in Riley, Geary, Pottawatomie and Clay counties. Big Lakes' mission is to provide quality services and programs which promote independence, productivity, integration and inclusion into the community for persons with developmental disabilities.

History of I/DD Reimbursement Rates

The services Big Lakes provides is paid for through the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) I/DD Medicaid waiver. Medicaid reimbursement rates are determined by the state and providers are forced to accept whatever reimbursement the state (now MCOs) deems as "adequate". The last time reimbursement rates were increased was in fiscal year 2008. **Without an increase this budget cycle, we will have ELEVEN CONSECUTIVE YEARS with no increase to reimbursement rates.** Since 2008, HCBS rates have remained stagnant, other state funded grants have been eliminated, targeted case management rates have been cut, policy changes have reduced what we can bill for and individual services plans have been reduced. In the meantime, the costs of providing those services have skyrocketed and **turnover and vacancy rates of staff have reached critical mass** because we cannot compete in the current business environment.

Why should you care?

People with disabilities rely on direct support professionals (DSP) to be there for them and provide the services they need. **Most individuals with I/DD will need some form of care and support their entire lives.** **DSPs have total responsible for the health, safety and welfare of the individuals in their care.** The supports provided are as diverse as those served. Just a few of their responsibilities include: help them get and keep a job, provide care when they are sick, assist them with bathing and toileting, help them budget, provide transportation, wash their clothes, fix their wheelchair,

prepare their meals, manage and administer their medications, dry their tears, mediate arguments, and cheer for their success.

They are their life coach, big brother/sister, nurse, housekeeper, banker, dishwasher, cook, relationship counselor, financial planner, personal shopper and in some cases, the only family they have. This is HARD WORK!

Workforce Crisis

At Big Lakes, starting wage for a DSP is \$10.00 per hour. HOWEVER, in order to pay that much, we must classify half of our direct support staff as part-time with no paid benefits. We also must limit the hours of individual support our clients receive which results in a high client to staff ratio, which places our clients at risk. All this makes a very stressful DSP job even more difficult. It also means high turnover. In the Manhattan area, someone can easily find a job flipping burgers or driving a delivery truck that pays more, has less stress and responsibilities, no night, evening or weekend work and less paperwork and training requirements.

There is a workforce crisis for direct support professionals. Finding good quality applicants that are willing to do this work and can meet the minimum requirements, including background checks, drug screening and good driving record is hard. But, finding an individual that is also caring, compassionate and can connect with this population is rare and extremely difficult. Unemployment in the Manhattan area has averaged around 3% for many years. The pool of qualified applicants is very small and most qualified people are already employed. Wages and benefits need to be competitive for us to recruit individuals and consider this field as a career. Big Lakes employs 203 direct support staff. In 2016, turnover was at an all-time high of 57%. Over 100 employees came and left and it took on average 70 days to hire a replacement. As of March 1st, we have 9 full-time and 32 part-time positions unfilled. Those vacancy numbers have also been consistent for the past six years. Direct support professionals must be paid a wage that enables them to make this a career while they support their families.

Summary

So what does high turnover mean to the people we serve? There is a carousel of people in and out of their lives. There is no consistency in care. They can't depend on the same person to be there next month or even next week. There is a stranger helping you with the most intimate parts of your daily life. How would this make you feel?

So what does high turnover mean to Big Lakes? In May, 2016, for the first time in our history, Big Lakes stopped admissions. Individuals that are in crisis or receive waiting list funds cannot access our services. Big Lakes cannot serve people off the waiting list until we can find and keep staff for those already in services. As the legislature considers funding the waiting list, community capacity and infrastructure issues must be addressed. The number one capacity issue is the workforce shortage.

People with intellectual and developmental disability need and deserve services delivered qualified employees that can make this profession their lives' work. Direct support professionals need and deserve a wage that values their hard work and compensates them fairly and adequately for their responsibilities so they make a living doing it. In closing, I want to reiterate my support for SB173 or any other bill that would enhance reimbursement rates for I/DD HCBS waiver services. Thank you.