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January 25, 2021

Governor Steve Sisolak

State Capitol Building

101 N. Carson Street

Carson City, NV 89701

Dear Governor Sisolak:

First, we would like to thank you for all you have done so far to help Nevadans during this crisis. We see the difficulty you face while trying to support our great State of Nevada while receiving minimal federal support and a concerning minority of violent conspiracy theorists who would condemn even your most generous and kind acts on behalf of all our citizens. It is not easy to lead during these trying times, but you have managed to maintain great balance and peace, all considered.

In November, the Commission on Aging wrote you a letter describing the importance of maintaining long term services and supports for our most vulnerable populations in Nevada. We are delighted that Medicaid rate cuts were not necessary for these vital services, including in-home care services that allow these consumers to stay in their homes; however, more needs to be done. During the pandemic, people with disabilities have lost their personal care services due to, not only the expected Medicaid rate cuts, but also because there is simply a shortage of individuals who are willing to take these high-risk positions with such minimal compensation. These are front-line jobs that require comprehensive training and certification, and they are hired as contractors who must deduct federal taxes, healthcare, transportation costs and ongoing training fees to maintain their positions, while being expected to care for their own families with whatever is left of their disproportionately small paychecks.

We know that institutionalization is much more costly than providing services to keep individuals in their homes; yet this is exactly what is happening. This is truly creating a dynamic that causes our state to violate Olmstead principles by taking away the least restrictive environment for our consumers, through no fault of their own, and it is a problem that we believe can be solved with some minor adjustments.

Of course, increasing CMS reimbursement rates would be ideal, but we realize that is not very likely any time soon. The Nevada Statewide Independent Living Council (NV SILC) has been exploring creative ways we can address the issues at hand and have been looking at what other states are doing. Along with some initiatives we are taking to open-up opportunities for personal care assistants (PCA’s) to advance their certifications into the nursing field, we see that there needs to be further incentive to maintain a sufficient workforce with the unusual challenges we face right now. Especially now, when our providers are hemorrhaging contractors, we would like to ask for your support in providing immediate regulatory and/or emergency additional hazard pay to maintain this particular segment of the workforce during the pandemic until we can implement other strategies to support these at-risk populations. I know our state is running low on CARES Act support, but with the new federal administration expected to send more support soon, we are hoping you will be able to prevent Nevada’s disabled population from increasing the nursing home death rate during the pandemic through supporting this one extremely important area of need at this time.

Even with the vaccines, our future is uncertain. I am hopeful we can contain this virus in a way that improves our lifestyles and mental health, but the crisis is not over yet. Thank you for your leadership, and for listening and considering our request. We believe it is an area that has been overlooked; not deliberately, but it is at the top of our list of urgent needs right now, and only you can curtail the imminent danger our disability community faces at this time.

Sincerely,

Patricia Unruh, Chair, NV SILC, Transition Workgroup and a consumer

Renee Portnell, NV SILC member, Transition Workgroup member and a consumer

Kate Osti, NV SILC member

Havander Davis, NV SILC member and a consumer

Sabra McWhirter, NV SILC and Transition Workgroup member

Lynda Tourloukis, NV SILC member

Mary Evilsizer, Executive Director, Southern Nevada Center for Independent Living

and NV SILC member

Erik Jimenez, NV SILC member

Jennifer Kane, NV SILC member

Victoria Essner, NV SILC member

Cheyenne Pasquale, Chief, Aging and Disability Services Division and NV SILC member

Dawn Lyons, Executive Director, NV SILC

Lisa Bonie, Executive Director, Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living

and Transition Workgroup member

Julie Steinbaugh, NV SILC Transition Workgroup member

DeeDee Foremaster, Executive Director, Rural Center for Independent Living

and Transition Workgroup member

Lucy Wroldsen, NV SILC Transition Workgroup member

Steven Cohen, NV SILC Transition Workgroup member

Deanna Gay, NV SILC Transition Workgroup member

Regina Daniel, NV SILC Transition Workgroup member