March XX, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

We write to express our concern regarding the ability of seniors and people with disabilities to continue to access critical home and community based services as the U.S. responds to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Specifically, we urge you to ensure that gathering places for seniors and people with disabilities, as well as the home care workers that serve them, are adequately equipped to protect some of the most at-risk Americans from this virus.

Seniors and people with disabilities often rely on critical services both through their local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to remain in their homes and communities. In 2017, AAAs, senior centers and local provider organizations served over 10 million individuals ages 60 and up through a variety of crucial services authorized under the Older Americans Act, including home delivered meals and congregate meals at senior centers. Also, in 2017, 4.6 million Americans received supports at home through Medicaid HCBS. Combined, these programs support seniors and people with disabilities through a network of providers, allowing them to remain at home – which is overwhelmingly where they prefer to be.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at this time most Americans have little immediate risk of exposure to COVID-19. Nevertheless, initial research has shown that people with pre-existing health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, hypertension and cancer are at an increased risk of serious complications if infected with COVID-19. Older adults are more likely than their peers to experience one or more of these chronic conditions. It is our concern that the organizations and health care workers

1 Department of Health and Human Services, “FY 2017 Report to Congress: Older Americans Act.”
that serve seniors in their homes and communities could, without proper training and protection, inadvertently spread COVID-19 among at-risk seniors and be put at risk themselves.\(^5\)

Similarly, seniors and people with disabilities rely on a network of services to remain in their homes and communities and asking them to stay home, to avoid the community organizations that serve them, or to deny a home care worker access to their home would have unintended consequences. We urge you to provide clarity on the steps taken to protect seniors, people with disabilities and the workforce that provides them essential services as COVID-19 spreads. We request you provide answers to the following questions:

1. How will the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) ensure that seniors and people with disabilities continue to receive necessary services through the aging network?
   a. Please provide a copy of any guidance the Administration for Community Living has provided to State Units on Aging and AAAs regarding COVID-19, including guidance on the use or provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies, what AAAs should do in the event of a local community outbreak and what steps agencies should take to prepare for the virus.
   b. Please describe the process in place to guarantee that seniors and people with disabilities receiving home delivered meals continue to have access to this service should their local service provider close.
   c. Many seniors and people with disabilities rely on congregate meals through their local senior centers, please describe the plan in place to provide people with alternative meals, including the possibility of temporary home delivered meals, should their local service provider close.

2. For seniors and people with disabilities receiving Medicaid HCBS, many home care workers are employed at agencies that may not have access to proper supplies or available trainings regarding COVID-19. Please provide the following information regarding home care workers and COVID-19:
   a. Please describe the steps taken by HHS to ensure that home care workers have access to PPE.
   b. Please describe the steps taken by HHS to ensure that home care workers receive training on the proper use of PPE.
   c. Please provide a copy of any education furnished to home care workers to help them identify possible COVID-19 symptoms and guidance to minimize the possibility of transmission amongst clients.

\(^5\) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “How COVID-19 Spreads” (March 4, 2020)
Please provide this information no later than March XX, 2020. We also request a staff briefing no later than March XX, 2020. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

cc:  
Dr. Deborah L. Birx  
Coronavirus Response Coordinator  
White House Coronavirus Task Force