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Emergency relief needed immediately to protect thousands of vulnerable individuals

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the leaders of four human services trade associations today called on the Administration and the Legislature to provide *“immediate emergency relief”* to the community-based human services sector that cares for one-in-ten state residents.

The sector, which contains nearly 180,000 jobs across the Commonwealth, is “on the precipice of collapse without aggressive action from state government,” noted the leaders of the Association for Behavioral Healthcare, the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers, the Children’s League of Massachusetts and the Providers’ Council. The four organizations represent nearly 300 community-based nonprofits that provide critical services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, people with mental health or addiction issues, women and elders seeking protection from abuse, and residents who are homeless or hungry – just to name a few.

A recent survey of providers responded that nearly 30% had less than 16 days cash on hand and over half had less than 31 days cash on hand. In addition, some have initiated staff reductions and virtually all will be laying off staff without additional financial resources.

“While we appreciate the attention received from the Administration and Legislature, we must underscore that our community homes and shelters, with thousands in our care, are on the precipice of collapse without aggressive action from state leaders, and we need more immediate emergency relief,” noted Michael Weekes, President/CEO of the Providers’ Council. “To date, more than 500 community day programs and all child care programs have closed. Providers are reviewing options to protect the health and safety of clients and staff.”

The four associations noted three main items that are needed immediately:

- **Regular funding and help with cash flow:** The state must commit to pay all programs their annual budgeted funding in one-24th payments, regardless of utilization. This will ensure the future viability of organizations and that staff members are being paid, thereby not

overburdening state systems with requests for unemployment, emergency food, temporary shelter and more.

- **Additional supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and tests:** Shelters, congregate care and home outreach programs need access to gloves, masks, sanitizers and more to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect staff and others in congregate care, including children and older residents. Some staff and residents must be tested to ensure the environment is safe for current and future residents.
- **Funds to cover extraordinary costs:** Community-based organizations need more funding to pay overtime costs and hire relief staff to work shifts when employees are ill or are caring for someone who is sick. Providers also need additional funding for unanticipated supply requests and to cover additional janitorial and/or transportation costs.

“Safety net providers are doing their best to ensure that individuals who are highly vulnerable continue to receive care,” said ABH President/CEO Lydia Conley. “Their ability to continue to do so is in jeopardy without appropriate staffing and supplies.”

The association executives noted that while the state has moved quickly on several issues related to COVID-19, the community-based human services community – that cares for one-in-ten state residents – needs more assistance immediately.

“We appreciate that the Administration and Legislature are under considerable pressure with a myriad of needs to be met,” noted Children’s League President/CEO Tammy Mello. “It is our hope that aggressively addressing these issues in providing service to our state’s vulnerable residents will mitigate the need for these residents to enter hospitals and further stress our health care system.”

“The Administration and Legislature do understand the tremendous pressure on human services. The issue is time,” added Ellen Attaliades, President/CEO of ADDP. “Without immediate funding to maintain programs and continue agency operations, providers will not be able to fulfill their role as the safety net during and after this pandemic.”

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ABOUT THE TRADE ASSOCIATIONS:

Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers • <https://www.addp.org/>

Association for Behavioral Healthcare • <https://www.abhmass.org/>

Children’s League of Massachusetts • <https://www.childrensleague.org/>

Providers’ Council • <https://providers.org/>