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Comments

U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions White Paper on Preparing for the Next Pandemic

While we appreciate the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions' attempt to prepare for the next pandemic, **[your name or organization's name]** finds the *White Paper on Preparing for the Next Pandemic* incomplete. The White Paper does not address the rights and needs of people with disabilities whatsoever, and avoids the devastating infection and fatality rates of people with disabilities in institutional facilities. People who live in nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, group homes, psychiatric facilities, detention facilities, prisons, and jails are at greater risk by virtue of the fact that they live in these facilities.

As reported in *Forbes* on May 26, 2020, 42 percent of the U.S. COVID-19 deaths are from nursing facilities and assisted living facilities. This means that nearly 50 percent of COVID-19 deaths come from 0.6% of the U.S. population.¹ Black and Brown people with disabilities are disproportionately represented in this death toll.

People with disabilities — one in four Americans — can not be left out of the country's preparations for the next pandemic. This includes over 2 million people with disabilities in nursing facilities and other institutions. It must be noted that these individuals are not admitted to nursing facilities simply because of their age; they are admitted because they are unable to secure appropriate disability services and supports to live at home and in their community.

[I / your organization's name] join the Partnership in suggesting a 6th recommendation to the *White Paper on Preparing for the Next Pandemic*, as follows:

Ensuring that all people with disabilities, including older adults with disabilities, are equally protected in a pandemic, as well as future public health emergencies and disasters by:

- a. Protecting the lives and enforcing the rights of people with disabilities in their communities,
- b. Increasing home- and community-based services (HCBS),
- c. Establishing *Money Follows the Person* as an entitlement,
- d. Increasing the home healthcare workforce,

¹<https://www.forbes.com/sites/theapothecary/2020/05/26/nursing-homes-assisted-living-facilities-0-6-of-the-u-s-population-43-of-u-s-covid-19-deaths/#12a617>

- e. Increasing affordable, accessible housing,
- f. Increasing and ensuring the availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for people with disabilities, the home healthcare workforce, and direct service providers,
- g. Passing the [REAAID for Disasters Act](#),
- h. Passing the [Disaster Relief Medicaid Act](#)

To truly ensure that people who live in congregate settings will not be at higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 and any other outbreak of infection, they must be diverted and transitioned from those settings. This can only be done by investing in sufficient HCBS to prevent institutionalization, support people with disabilities in successfully transitioning back to the community and maintaining adequate supports and services (who chose) to remain/live? at home.

Failure to address these gaps will lead to preventable deaths in the next pandemic. Policies that protect the rights of people with disabilities in the next pandemic are not simply a good idea, but are critical to saving lives. The current pandemic has made this startlingly clear.

[Add your personal comments or additional concerns, such as ensuring people with disabilities in congregate facilities will have the right to receive visitors]

Sincerely,

[Your name

Email

Organization Name

Address

Website]