

Maryland Regional Direct Services Collaborative
SB307 – “Direct Care Workforce Innovation Program”
Economic Matters – Hearing March 23 1:30

Presentation by Ron Carlson
Executive Director
Maryland Regional Direct Services Collaborative

Over the course of the past year the Maryland Regional Direct Services Collaborative has sought to tackle the array of pandemic related problems confronted by individuals and families across the state. As Executive Director, I can report that our Board of Directors has become increasingly aware and concerned about the dire shortage of frontline direct care workers. We are reminded on a daily basis of the seriousness of the problem as families in our community report the difficulties they face in finding trained direct care workers; problems that have too long been overlooked. The pandemic has underscored the seriousness of the shortfall.

The Collaborative was created in 2017 with the mission of assuring the availability of a well-trained direct services workforce throughout the state and region. Our stakeholders represent a cross section of the education, health care provider, public sector and business organizations. For three years the Collaborative has worked to elevate attention across Maryland and beyond to the critical importance of this part of the workforce.

SB307 comes at a critically important time - and the pandemic has amplified its importance. The legislation offers a modest level of support that will serve as a resource to organizations across Maryland developing new ways to address the workforce problem. Non-profits, labor organizations and others are putting together new and innovative solutions to work; strategies that take on the increasing problems of training, recruitment and retention of direct care workers.

The solutions are not easy, but this “grants-matching” – public private partnership – would be a step in the right direction.

It has been said, that if physicians are the composers and nurses are the conductors in the health care area, the frontline direct care workers are the instruments through which today's health care is delivered.

The crisis level we face is a critical shortfall the availability of these essential direct care workers:

- Certified Nursing Assistants
- Home Health Aides
- Personal Care Aides
- Geriatric Nursing Assistants
- Psychiatric Aides

The Problem is Serious

- Today, the direct care workforce constitutes more than one third of the total healthcare workforce outnumbering physicians, nurses and para-medical personnel -
- During the course of the pandemic the state has seen a continued erosion of available frontline workers triggered by the impact of issues; affecting their ability to access to testing, PPE and confronting transportation challenges in getting to and from work -
- In Maryland, the number of older adults is predicted to grow by 75% within the next 30 years to 1.5 million in 2045 – during the same period the number adults aged 85 and over will increase by nearly 200 percent –
- Those in this older adult age group are ones who are the most vulnerable to the risks of COVID 19 infections given the probabilities of associated underlying medical conditions - • The backbone of today's workforce are those care givers that assist individuals with the daily tasks of preparing meals, managing medications, providing transportation and much more – that backbone is in need of our support – current recruitment initiatives helping but are not closing the gap –
- Currently, 15% of the adults aged 65 and older require direct care assistance –

The Unmet Need Continues -

- Based on the report commissioned by the Maryland Regional Direct Services Collaborative and produced by PHI, the leading research organization that has long studied this workforce issue, the State of Maryland will need 40% more direct care workers in the next four years -
- The direct services workforce is beleaguered with problems that help explain why building the workforce is challenging, e.g., hourly wages are low, about \$13 an hour on average; 1 in 10 live in poverty; 43% rely on some form of public assistance; most face the practical transportation problem of getting to and from their jobs -

SB307 Helps Set a New Direction -

- As we understand the approach, each year beginning in FY 2022, grant support at \$250,000 will be made available to eligible organizations on a matching basis to enable them to build and expand on new and successful recruitment and retention strategies geared to addressing the range of barriers that stand in the way of increasing the size and number of direct care workers-
- Guidelines are fitted into the legislation to assure a clear and equitable approach. Very importantly, it calls for the coordination with others; an approach that is in keeping with that of the Collaborative.

SB307 sets a foundation upon which the state of Maryland can expect to see a measurable change in the availability of direct care workers. This long overlooked issue which has been exacerbated by the pandemic can no longer be overlooked. COVID-19 has taught us that. More will need to be done as we have pointed out over the past three years. In working with others across the state, the Collaborative has taken the leadership on this critical workforce issues. This can and should be the long awaited beginning by the State of Maryland to closing the workforce gap.