March 25, 2020

Dr. Amy Acton, Director
Ohio Department of Health
246 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215
VIA EMAIL

RE: COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment for Developmental Disability In-Home Staff

Dear Dr. Acton:

We write today with an urgent plea to designate County Boards of Developmental Disabilities (DD) as essential, high-priority government agencies for receiving personal protective equipment (PPE) as soon as it becomes available. For the purposes of this request, our system is in particular need of:

- Protective face masks (both N95 face masks and simple face shields);
- Protective gloves;
- Protective eyewear;
- Protective gowns;
- Thermometers; and
- Disinfection and sanitization supplies.

County boards of DD are uniquely equipped to act as local distribution points for PPE for use by in-home care DD provider agencies in all 88 counties. We are geographically distributed across the entire state, operate out of secure facilities, and have good relationships with providers in each county that will be essential to getting this equipment where it is needed most. We are perfectly suited for this task and are willing to execute at a moment’s notice.

As you know, front-line DD health aides and DD direct support professionals are working around the clock in Ohio’s developmental disability system to maintain the health and safety of people in high-risk categories for contracting COVID-19. As is the case for hospital staff, medical professionals, and first responders, the ongoing shortage of PPE is preventing DD provider staff from doing their jobs safely and effectively.

This PPE shortage will have dire results if not addressed soon. Specifically, we fear that many lives could be lost needlessly if Ohio’s DD provider staff do not have the tools to:

1. **protect themselves from becoming infected with COVID-19** as they enter the personal living spaces of people with developmental disabilities and their families who may have contracted the virus;

2. **prevent themselves from transmitting COVID-19 to the people with developmental disabilities they support** in instances where they have unknowingly contracted and become contagious with the virus prior to entering these individuals’ homes; and

3. **protect the developmental disabilities community at large from the continued spread of COVID-19**, as many staff will be visiting multiple homes for personal care needs throughout the day and could serve as key vectors of transmission (particularly as community spread begins to spike and staff shortages rise dramatically).
People with developmental disabilities often have no choice on whether or not someone will come into their home to help them with their daily needs. Many require in-home services to perform even the most routine but critical daily functions (such as eating, dressing, bathing, using the bathroom, taking medications, and other similar tasks). It is unconscionable to ask them to accept a serious risk of contracting COVID-19 simply to survive when transmission is preventable through PPE.

Please contact me personally or through a member of your team to discuss how we can make PPE available within our system. We are also eager to discuss how county boards of DD can better integrate themselves into the State of Ohio’s overall COVID-19 response as front-line response agencies. People with developmental disabilities must not be overlooked during this crisis. We must find ways to keep them as safe as possible.

Again, thank you for all you are doing to help us defeat COVID-19. Your stewardship of this crisis under Governor DeWine’s leadership (and your agency’s continued high level of performance) has been a beacon of hope for Ohioans in this difficult time. We support your strong, continued leadership in the days, weeks, and months to come and look forward to working more closely with your team to support people with developmental disabilities.

Sincerely,

BRIDGET GARGAN
Executive Director

cc: Jeff Davis, Director, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities
    Pete Moore, President/CEO, Ohio Provider Resource Association