

Media Contact:

Sara McMillan

904.504.7471

smcmillan@arcjacksonville.org



8 Days to Resolve Funding Crisis for People with Disabilities

Jacksonville, Fla. (July 23, 2020) – The Arc Jacksonville and the disability community across the state of Florida will lose their federal and state-issued emergency coronavirus funding on August 1. The clock is ticking as of 4 p.m. Friday, July 17 for these providers to make the impossible choice of whether to risk the health and safety of their clients during a pandemic or close programs.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) cut funding for organizations that serve adults with disabilities. The emergency funds received in the past three months are governed by a policy designed to cover services during a short-term natural disaster, not a long-term pandemic. This news comes as the U.S. is experiencing an alarming spike in coronavirus cases and deaths, and Florida has been hit very hard. It would be dangerous and irresponsible to resume in-person services for this particularly vulnerable population at this time.

As the current health crisis grew, providers converted the majority of their programs to virtual models like every other industry and educational organization in the country. If the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), the governing body for the state, does not continue funding these organizations, it will impact nearly 35,000 people with disabilities statewide.

“If we do not speak up now about cuts to services for people with disabilities, where will it end?” said Jim Whittaker, President and CEO of The Arc Jacksonville. “If we close these programs, there will be no place to receive vital, state-mandated services that reduce abuse and neglect, ensure dignity and quality of life, and assist those who are already marginalized.”

Funding is just one issue Whittaker and other advocates point to as a failure by the state of Florida to protect people with disabilities. Disability organizations have been forced to garner their own personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 testing for residents living in group homes. In contrast, state testing and PPE are being provided every two weeks for residents and staff in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. These two populations have very similar risk profiles for COVID-19, yet are receiving extremely different responses from the state.

“We must value and protect this at-risk community in the same way we protect the elderly,” Whittaker continued. “These individuals and the staff on the front line who care for them are essential.”

Organizations providing services for people with disabilities are requesting that APD release the already budgeted state funding for day programs, while pursuing other options with the federal government, including an emergency funding extension. The clock is ticking with less than two weeks to figure it out.

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About The Arc Jacksonville

The Arc Jacksonville serves and advocates for individuals with intellectual and developmental differences to achieve their full potential and to participate in community life. Through incredible partnerships within the Northeast Florida community, The Arc Jacksonville, a local nonprofit, provides a full complement of residential, educational, training, pre-employment and employment initiatives.

Editor's Note: The Arc Jacksonville is not an acronym and Arc should never be in all capital letters. When referring to the organization, please use The Arc Jacksonville, not The ARC, The ARC Jacksonville and never ARC. The Arc Jacksonville should be considered as a title or phrase.

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