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NJCDD Statement on the Importance of the *Affordable Care Act* and Medicaid in the lives of People with Developmental Disabilities

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities is deeply concerned with the proposed cuts to Medicaid that are a major component of the *American Health Care Act*, which was passed by the US House of Representatives in May of this year. Accompanying legislation is currently under consideration within the US Senate. Over the past several decades, there have been several major advances made by Americans with disabilities both in New Jersey and across the country. Chief among them has been the establishment of Medicaid as a critical funding source for people with lifelong disabilities (including intellectual and developmental disabilities) to receive safe and adequate care within their communities.

In New Jersey and across the country, Medicaid funds the vast majority of services and community-based supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). In fact, in order to receive any kind of services through the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities, residents **MUST** be Medicaid-eligible. Far more than simply paying for visits to the doctor, Medicaid funding allows people with I/DD to access in-home health aides; day programs; job coaching and employment support; respite services for their loved-ones; physical, cognitive, and behavioral therapies; prescription drugs; medical equipment; and much more. In New Jersey, over 300 thousand individuals with disabilities rely on Medicaid for healthcare and disability-related support services. If enacted, the AHCA could cause more than 33% of those New Jersey residents, or nearly 114 thousand people with disabilities to lose the coverage on which their very lives depend.

The 2010 passage of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (ACA) has arguably been the greatest legislative advance for people with disabilities since the 1990 *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA). The law's most important accomplishment has been its expansion of Medicaid, which has enabled people with disabilities to have greater access to services, new treatments and prescription medications, and increased provider reimbursements (Direct Support Professionals and Home Health Aides). The Medicaid expansion also funded the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) initiative from the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid. HCBS plays an essential role in moving citizens with developmental disabilities out of segregated institutional-based care into inclusive and dignified community-based living and support settings. In addition, the ACA ensures that people with disabilities cannot be denied insurance coverage because of preexisting conditions. For those with lifelong disabilities, there are no longer lifelong or annual caps on the healthcare coverage they receive. Essential health benefits such as rehabilitative services and devices, mental health and behavioral health services, and preventive and wellness services are now mandated for all insurance providers. And all younger Americans can now stay on their parents' insurance plans up to the age of 26.

In order to protect and maintain the progress that citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have worked so hard for over the past several decades, we **MUST** urge our leaders in Congress as well as the President to maintain full funding of Medicaid as well as the protections established within the ACA. To be clear, *ANY* cuts to Medicaid, let alone the over \$830 billion that has been prescribed within the AHCA, would be disastrous for Americans with lifelong disabilities including I/DD. This is perhaps the greatest challenge that Americans with disabilities have faced in a generation. But the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities stands with individuals with I/DD, their families, and all other disability advocates on both sides of the political divide to fight to protect the supports and services that allow *all* Americans, regardless of disability, to live inclusive, self-directed, and dignified lives within our communities.