



Message from the President

Recent actions by Governor Maura Healey and the Massachusetts legislature are offering hope that the human service sector may see increased funding to help with its workforce shortage.

On May 8, Charles River staff joined Advocates for Autism of Massachusetts (AFAM) for an Autism Advocacy Day on Beacon Hill. Those who gathered shared stories of frustration when family members are unable to access programs and services because of insufficient staff. They asked Governor Healey to provide more financial support so that organizations are able to hire the employees they need.

At Charles River, 66 percent of the individuals we serve have been able to return to day programs. We have a vacancy rate of 27 percent in all our programs and services. Prior to COVID, our vacancy rate was just a third of that, at 10 percent. Sadly, programs across the state that serve adults with disabilities are facing the same challenges that we are experiencing in hiring and retaining staff.

Individuals who remain at home are isolated from peers; have lost jobs because we can't hire job coaches to provide needed at-work support; and experienced a decline in communication, coping and self-help skills. Family members are tired, isolated, and feeling abandoned. Young adults turning 22 and aging out of the public school system are having difficulty finding a program to accept them. For them, it is a crisis of access to needed services.

Access to programs is even more dire for individuals with complex medical or behavioral needs and require 1:1 support. This group of people are disproportionately impacted due to their high level of staff support needs. We simply can't find the staff to provide the level of care and attention they need.

Our current workforce crisis will not improve until reimbursement rates allow providers to pay competitive wages commensurate with the level of job responsibility. Human services must be recognized as a profession that allows staff to care for their families, pay their school loans, drive decent cars, pay for housing, and live a life where they do not have to work multiple jobs.

I am encouraged by the investments proposed by Governor Healey and in the House budget. We will continue to advocate for our workforce, and for the individuals we serve.