

Spoken Testimony for the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions hearing: "Community Services and Supports: Planning Across the Generations"

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Mr.Chairmen, Members of the Committee, and Senate Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about Long-Term Care in our country. I have worked in the fields of aging and public health for three decades, and issues relating to older persons and people with disabilities are very close to my heart. I come from a very rural state, and for years have watch families struggle with the challenges of living in a place with limited options for home-and community based care, a shortage of health care professionals and entrenched systems that make it difficult to access services.

Finally, I see some movement toward a convergence, a nexus of disability services and aging services, placing the focus correctly on the *needs* of the individual instead of on what type of disability or category he/she occupies. Nationally, more program designs are granting individuals the right to choose, to determine their own pathways to independence, and live in the community as they desire. There are states with pilot projects and successful models that allow this to happen, not only for young persons with disabilities but also for our elders, who in the past have been faced with few options when their care needs increased. The pilot sites need to be expanded and adopted by more communities. Creative use of federal funds, Medicaid and targeted state dollars can enable states to develop appropriate responses to long-term care needs. The messages from the field are clear: 1) we need to accelerate efforts to streamline and consolidate

these complicated systems of care; 2) we can improve access by providing a single entry point into the long-term care system, with professional counselors to guide the process, and 3) we must keep the focus on the needs of the individual, first and foremost. We have a long way to go, and a difficult history to overcome. But it is a start, and we are moving forward. It is not a noble gesture, or a monumental task. It is simply the right thing to do.