



Written Statement for the Record

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Easterseals***

for the

***Health Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives***

on the

***Reauthorization of the Money Follows the Person Rebalancing
Demonstration Grant Program (H.R. 5306 - EMPOWER Care Act)***

September 5, 2018

Chairman Burgess, Ranking Member Green, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share Easterseals' strong support for the EMPOWER Care Act (H.R. 5306), bipartisan legislation that would extend the successful Money Follows the Person (MFP) Rebalancing Demonstration Grant Program.

Easterseals is a national network of more than 70 leading nonprofit organizations that provide local services to individuals with disabilities, veterans, older adults, and other Americans to help them fully participate in and contribute to their communities. Local Easterseals affiliates partner with their state Medicaid agencies to provide a range of life-changing supports, including autism services, medical rehabilitation, supported living, adult day health, and transportation services. In addition, some Easterseals affiliates help seniors and individuals with disabilities transition from nursing homes and other institutions into the community through the Money Follows the Person Program.

EIGHT YEAR NURSING HOME RESIDENT TRANSITIONS INTO COMMUNITY

Dallas, a Cincinnati-area man, moved into a nursing home following two major strokes and the sudden illness of his family caregiver. He remained in nursing care for the next eight years. Last year, the 55-year-old learned about HOME Choice, Ohio's MFP Program managed by the Ohio Department of Medicaid and implemented by a network of Ohio community organizations, including Easterseals affiliates. The program helps individuals with chronic conditions and disabilities transition from institutions back into the community with the support of specialized case management, coordination, and independent living and coaching services.ⁱ

Dallas was referred to Easterseals where an Easterseals Transition Coordinator met with Dallas to learn about his needs before connecting him to a senior apartment complex. Dallas had mixed emotions when he received the call notifying him that he was at the top of the waitlist for an accessible apartment that met his mobility needs. While he was excited about a new beginning, Dallas wondered if he could make it on his own given his mobility challenges and his past reliance on the nursing home for meals and other daily needs. Motivated by the success of past nursing home residents, Dallas decided to make the transition.

The first month was difficult, even overwhelming for Dallas. However, each day got easier, thanks to his Easterseals Transition Coordinator, who helped with every day activities from scheduling medical appointments and arranging transportation to developing work-around solutions for self-care and cooking given his physical and mobility challenges. Today, Dallas is managing his own affairs and successfully participating in and navigating his community, even taking short walks in his neighborhood without the use of his wheelchair. Just as he was influenced by others who transitioned to community care through the HOME Choice Program, Dallas wants to inspire others to do the same, urging interested individuals to “never give up!”

MFP REDUCES COSTS AND INCREASES SATISFACTION

Dallas is just one of more than 75,000 individuals from across the country who have transitioned from nursing home care to home- and community-based services through the Money Follows the Person Program.ⁱⁱ Established in 2005 by President George W. Bush, MFP was designed to help states rebalance their Medicaid long-term care systems, which were reliant on institutional care, and to assist states in developing the infrastructure and provider network to ensure a seamless transition to home and community-based settings and services.

The program, which has expanded to 43 states and the District of Columbia, has been successful in increasing consumer preference and quality of life and in saving states money.ⁱⁱⁱ An independent study found that 92 percent of all MFP participants liked their new community living setting following their transition, which represented a 32 percent increase in satisfaction compared to when they received institutional care.^{iv} National data also shows that MFP participants are less likely to be readmitted to nursing or institutional care during the first year following their transition.^v In addition, national analysis found notable declines in total Medicaid and Medicare expenditures after transitioning to the community through state Money Follows the Person programs. One report calculated a 23 percent (or about \$1,840) decrease in expenditures per-month, for each older adult beneficiary and a 23 percent (or \$1,783) drop for individuals with intellectual or physical disabilities. At the time of the study, MFP saved Medicaid and Medicare about \$978 million in long-term services and supports.^{vi}

Malisa and Kevin are two recent nursing home residents who are now thriving in their communities thanks to MFP and Easterseals. Both were admitted to nursing homes following health episodes. Malisa had emergency surgery due to significant infection that resulted in the partial amputation of her big toe. Kevin, then in his 40s, twice landed in nursing homes due to internal bleeding and liver problems. Malisa received nursing care for less than a year before she learned about her state's MFP Program while Kevin lived in some type of nursing facility for much of the previous 12 years of his life. Eight months after first meeting with an Easterseals MFP Transition Coordinator, 42-year-old Malisa moved into an apartment and began receiving community-based services. Today, Malisa is living independently, focusing on her health, and even picking up new hobbies, including crocheting. Kevin took a longer path toward independence, but he has achieved similar community success through the MFP Program. His Easterseals transition specialist worked directly with Kevin to assist him with medication management, finding and arranging medical transportation, and other skills to ensure long-term success. He is now living independently, managing his finances after opening a bank account, and receiving the supports he needs to remain healthy. Both are experiencing strong quality of life and their states are benefiting from cost savings from the more economical home and community-based services.

MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON SUCCESS AT RISK

Unfortunately, the program that helped Dallas, Malisa, and Kevin achieve greater independence and increased community engagement has expired. The most recent Money Follows the Person Program authorizing legislation ended on September 30, 2016. While states can use their remaining MFP grant funds, states are scaling back and making other changes to their MFP Programs. For example, one state narrowed program eligibility and limited available services in response to the program expiration. As a result, fewer people are transitioning into the community through this state's program. Easterseals affiliates who help individuals in this state transition into the community through MFP have reported 20-50 percent reductions in referrals for transition assistance.

The program is needed now more than ever. Easterseals affiliates in Ohio have reported an increased need for the program from adults with mental health and addiction challenges or who have a criminal background. Most are between 30 and 60 years old, making an extended nursing home stay expensive and inappropriate. An entire generation of individuals with disabilities and chronic conditions who are now living in nursing homes could lose their opportunity for greater independence and community engagement if the program is not renewed. Most Americans would prefer to receive their long-term care and supports in the home and community rather than in an institution, such as a nursing home.

EASTERSEALS SUPPORTS BIPARTISAN EFFORTS TO EXTEND MFP

Important efforts are underway in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to extend this vital program. Easterseals fully supports the EMPOWER Care Act (H.R. 5306 and S. 2227), bipartisan and bicameral legislation that would extend the Money Follows the Person Rebalancing Demonstration Grant Program at current funding levels through fiscal year 2022. In addition, the legislation makes commonsense changes, including reducing how long an individual must be in a nursing home before becoming eligible to transition and identifying and sharing state MFP best practices.

As a leader in self-directed and community-based services, Easterseals supports the effort to better match the needs and interests of individuals with disabilities and older adults by supporting their transition to community-based services and settings. As such, we fully support the EMPOWER Care Act and urge that Congress immediately consider and approve the legislation.

Thank you for holding this important hearing and for considering Easterseals' views.

ⁱ Ohio Department of Medicaid; <http://medicaid.ohio.gov/FOR-OHIOANS/Programs/Home-Choice>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/money-follows-the-person/index.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/money-follows-the-person/index.html>

^{iv} Mathematica Policy Research MFP 2014 Annual Evaluation Report; <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/money-follows-the-person-2014-annual-evaluation-report>

^v Report to the President and Congress: The Money Follows the Person (MFP) Rebalancing Demonstration <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/downloads/money-follows-the-person/mfp-rtc.pdf>

^{vi} Report to the President and Congress: The Money Follows the Person (MFP) Rebalancing Demonstration; <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/downloads/money-follows-the-person/mfp-rtc.pdf>