November 23, 2020

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street Room 208
Boston, MA. 02133

The Honorable Patrick O’Connor
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 419
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 243
Boston, MA. 02133

The Honorable Denise Garlick
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 238
Boston, MA. 02133

The Honorable Todd Smola
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 124
Boston, MA 02133

Re: FY21 Home Care Conference Budget Request: Adopt House Budget Enough Pay to Stay Line Item 9110-1635 Providing a 10% Rate Increase to Support Higher Wages for Home Care workers and Adopt House Outside Section 44 Establishing a Home Care Licensure Commission

Dear Members of the FY2021 Budget Conference Committee:

On behalf of the Home Care Aide Council and the Home Care Alliance of Massachusetts, we thank the House and Senate for your outstanding leadership and support for the state's home care system and our dedicated home care workforce in the FY21 budget. Our homemakers and home health aides are working tirelessly to ensure that vulnerable elders and persons with disabilities retain access to critical home care services during the COVID-19 pandemic and your support is greatly appreciated.

We respectfully urge the Conference Committee to support the House’s investment of $17.4 million and language for “Enough Pay to Stay” as outlined in Line Item 9110-1635 of H.5151 to provide an essential 10% rate increase for our frontline home care staff. This investment will help make progress toward getting our workforce to $15 per hour. It is important to note the $17.4 million appropriation will be reduced to a net cost of $9.8 million after FMAP or federal matching funds are applied.

This investment in home care rates and wages, especially in light of the unprecedented and sustained impact of the COVID-19 Emergency on the home care workforce, will help to address the critical shortage of frontline homemakers, personal care homemakers and home health aides which is now directly impacting consumer access to services.
Recent August 2020 data from Mass Home Care shows an alarming and increasing number of consumers currently waiting for home care services. The data showed 1,889 older adults were approved to receive services but are waiting for homemaker/personal care homemaker services - that represents a 40% increase compared to 763 elders waiting to receive services in FY'19. Of those consumers, 78% of were waiting for all hours of homemaker services to be filled. The primary reason was lack of home care workers.

Investing in the Home Care Workforce – who are all deemed essential workers – makes sense. It will save lives, provide jobs and save the Commonwealth money because keeping seniors at home is much more cost effective than institutional and congregate care settings.

**Home Care Licensure Commission – Adopt Outside Section 44 of H.5151**
We respectfully ask conferees to adopt House Outside Section 44 which provides a clear, rational path and process for establishing home care licensure in Massachusetts.

Outside Section 44 of H.5151 establishes a commission to study and make recommendations to implement a statewide licensing process for home care agencies by October 2021. The language serves as a framework to guide the commission, while allowing the 13-member body to direct its focus to ensure the recommendations yield the most effective licensing process that will protect consumers.

By contrast, Outside Section 98 of S. 2955 removes this flexibility by prescribing the scope of the commission’s work through statutory mandates that move beyond the scope of licensure and could deter the commission from focusing on matters directly aimed at protecting consumers. The language in S. 2955 Outside Section 98 is confusing, particularly regarding the two conflicting reporting dates by which the Commission must issue findings and recommendations. We support one clear deadline of October 1, 2021.

The commission's directive does not need to be specified beyond the clear framework in the House language. Outside Section 44 of H.5151 grants the authority to the commission to explore any issues the commission deems necessary. We urge the Conference Committee to allow the Commission to do its job and refrain from adding issue-specific mandates that could confuse and complicate the Commission’s work to establish a consumer-focused and effective licensure process.

Thank you again for your leadership and continued support for home care services and the home care aide workforce. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Julie Watt Faqir at jwattfaqir@hcacouncil.org or 857-404-6766 or Jake Krilovich at JKrilovich@thinkhomecare.org or 508-245-3560.

Sincerely,

Julie Watt Faqir  
Executive Director  
Home Care Aide Council

Patricia Kelleher  
Executive Director  
Home Care Alliance of MA
cc: Karen E. Spilka, President of the Senate
    Robert A. DeLeo, Speaker of the House
    Honorable Patricia Jehlen, Senate Chair, Committee on Elder Affairs
    Honorable Ruth Balser, House Chair, Committee on Elder Affairs
    Honorable Carmine Gentile
    Honorable Aaron Vega
    Honorable Danielle Gregoire