Dear Editor:

A recent editorial made a strong case for compensating health care personnel, transit workers and other professions who continue essential work through this pandemic. The writer called them “heroes,” and I strongly agree. To that list, I would like to add the more than 32,000 direct support professionals (DSPs) who work in residential group homes across Pennsylvania to keep adults with intellectual disabilities safe and healthy.

Through this crisis, DSPs are called to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week helping our most vulnerable population with meal preparation and feeding, bathing, dressing, dispensing medications and providing other vital cognitive, emotional and behavioral support. While they serve in the role of a health care provider, they are not included in the benefits that this group is being accorded in recent Covid-19 aid packages.

Residents in the Barber Institute’s 95 group homes have been in quarantine since mid-March, an extreme change that is often difficult for persons with intellectual disabilities to understand and adjust to. Yet, our DSPs have shown tremendous resolve in creating activities to keep adults comfortable, connected and healthy. To our DSPs, the adults do become like their own family.

The Pennsylvania state budget has not included a rate increase for DSPs in three years. Now is the time to change that. I would ask everyone who recognizes the value of these essential workers to urge our Governor and state representatives to include funding for DSP wages and services to persons with intellectual disabilities in the Covid-19 pandemic-related budget they are now formulating. If providers are to continue ensuring quality services for persons with intellectual disabilities, we need to fully support the heroes who work on the front line with our most vulnerable population.

Sincerely,

John Barber

President/Chief Executive Officer

Barber National Institute