

April 23, 2020

Governor Holcomb
200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb,

We want to shift your attention to the unique challenges and potentially serious circumstances that organizations such as Stone Belt and the Logan Center face during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stone Belt is a nonprofit organization that provides resources and support for individuals with disabilities. It is the oldest and largest organization of its kind in south-central Indiana, with locations in Bloomington, Bedford and Columbus. Stone Belt offers programs that foster a self-motivated pursuit for personal and professional growth that lead to employment opportunities and active citizenship.

Although Stone Belt has closed its day services for over 300 clients, the organization continues to support roughly 120 clients in residential programs. Other services, such as its psychiatric clinic, employment, and behavior management are offered through telemedicine where possible. A small workforce is maintained in Stone Belt's manufacturing program so that it can continue to supply Cook Medical with products that are in high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time this letter was penned, Stone Belt has had two employees test positive for COVID-19, and one client was transported with COVID-19 symptoms. Test results are forthcoming. We believe we can anticipate an increase in confirmed or presumed cases, and Stone Belt is making plans accordingly.

Similar to Stone Belt, the Logan Center offers support to disabled Hoosiers in day, employment, and residential settings. On March 23rd, the Logan Center closed its day services and suspended other programs that serve approximately 943 clients. During the pandemic, the Logan Center continues to serve 189 clients in 35 residential settings in St. Joseph and Elkhart County. The services they provide require staff to deliver intimate physical assistance for many activities of daily living including toileting, feeding, and providing arm's length guidance. Many clients are not able to understand and/or comply with the need for hygiene and social distancing. And many clients that are served have compromised immune systems or are elderly, which puts them at a higher risk of severe illness and need for hospitalization should they become ill.

Our concerns for clients are exacerbated with fears that Stone Belt's workforce will be decreased by illness or unwillingness to stay on the front lines of this pandemic. We remain concerned that Stone Belt and the Logan Center will not have enough PPE to protect its employees for the duration of this health crisis. **We are asking that you prioritize access to PPE for disability service providers.**

While Stone Belt and the Logan Center have made decisions based on what it feels is best for clients and staff, we have deep concerns for its ongoing financial stability in light of recent news. Last week, Secretary Sullivan reported in a phone conference that none of the following items were approved to be included in the State's submission of Appendix K to the Medicaid Waiver:

1. Increased rates
2. Retainer payments
3. Enhanced benefits

Furthermore, it appears that Stone Belt is not eligible for the federal Payroll Protection Program since the organization employs over 500 individuals. Therefore, the hope for financial support through the COVID-19 pandemic appears very dim at this point. Stone Belt is currently absorbing at least \$150,000 in increased costs/unfunded services each month. This is the biggest challenge and we are heartened by the resiliency of clients and staff, including those who have voluntarily come forward to provide care to ill clients in the isolation center. However, without the financial support from the state and federal governments, Stone Belt does not have the means to survive.

Under your authority we are asking for the following:

Urge the State Budget Agency (SBA) to finalize its review of FSSA's Appendix K and to include a request for increased rates, retainer payments and enhanced benefits as they submit it to CMS to give Stone Belt a better chance of weathering this health crisis.

Urge the SBA to use part of the 6.2% increase in federal Medicaid matching funds (through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act enacted on March 18) for temporary rate increases for services to individuals with disabilities, as well as retainer payments to providers who have had to temporarily close services in order for them to continue operations throughout and after the national emergency.

This crisis has proven that we have the will to survive. People with developmentally disabilities must not be forgotten, and now more than ever they need your support.

Sincerely,



Mark Stoops
State Senator
District #40



David Niezgodski
State Senator
District #10