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Dear Member of Congress:

Each June, VOR members from across the country come to Washington, D.C. to advocate for their loved ones with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

When VOR members first learned of their newborn son, daughter, brother, or sister's severe intellectual and developmental disabilities, they knew that their life would take a new path. They accepted this and devoted themselves to caring for and protecting their loved one who would always be dependent upon them. They accepted the daily struggles of feeding, bathing, diapering, dressing, lifting, attending to seizures, administering medications and therapies, keeping a watchful eye so that their loved one would not harm themselves or others, and protecting them from those who would do them harm. This care is an awesome responsibility, one that wears down and can break many a family. Eventually, families often turn to others for help, and Medicaid-funded programs have been a life-sustaining answer.

Never did families think that this path, that already took so much from them emotionally and physically, would also involve a constant struggle against powerful DOJ and HHS-funded lawsuits and lobbying activities aimed at closing large Medicaid-licensed residential facilities and work and day programs that their loved ones rely upon. The worry and added stress these actions place upon families is inhumane given all that they already face.

Never did they think that this path would also entail explaining to legislators that the law – the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Supreme Court *Olmstead* decision – that was designed to protect individuals with disabilities was being twisted and misused in a way that undermined health and safety and removed essential care and supports.

Like the ADA and *Olmstead*, VOR stands for the full continuum of care – facility to community-based to one's own home – and civil rights for *all* individuals with I/DD. We know that one size does not fit all. And, we know that **individual choice, a key element of the ADA**, is the best means to protect the rights of disabled citizens.

When you meet with VOR members this June, please take into consideration these struggles and the knowledge we have gained through them. **We urge you to listen to our calls for oversight of DOJ and HHS, agencies that have run amok when it comes to disability law and policy**, harming our country's most fragile citizens and misusing tens of millions of tax dollars on lawsuits which attack Congressionally-authorized care. And finally, listen to the appreciation in our members' voices, as they tell you the importance Medicaid has played in the lives of their family members with I/DD. Our loved ones and the Medicaid programs that sustain them are worth fighting for. This is what brings us back to Washington each year.

Sincerely,

Caroline Lahrmann, VOR President