

The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray, Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
2207 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
2415 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 3, 2025

Dear Chairwoman Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The undersigned organizations write to share our support for federal funding for the Protection and Advocacy Systems.

The President's proposed budget includes major funding cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Among those cuts is a proposal for the complete elimination of large parts of the Administration for Community Living (ACL), including the programs that administer the Protection and Advocacy Agencies, commonly known as "the P&As."

As the House and Senate do their work, it is critical that funding for these programs remain intact.

The P&As are nonprofit agencies that investigate abuse and neglect and provide advocacy on behalf of children and adults with disabilities. They were established by Congress in the 1970's, in response to accounts of horrific conditions in institutions housing people with disabilities. P&As are the last line of defense against abuse, neglect, unnecessary institutionalization, and discrimination. They provide a watchful eye over vulnerable children and adults placed away from their families and communities.

In addition to investigating abuse and neglect complaints, P&As advocate for access and accountability for children and adults with disabilities in health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, voting, and within the juvenile and criminal justice systems. There is one P&A agency in every state and territory in the U.S. and one that serves the Native American population in the Four Corners region of the Southwest.

One in four Americans have a disability, which places a great responsibility on the P&A network. Since their inception, they have protected the health, safety and well-being of thousands of children and adults with disabilities across the U.S. through systemic advocacy, individual assistance, as well as monitoring and investigating abuse and neglect in institutions and group care facilities. They provide exemplary assistance on a shoestring budget, through the hard work of hundreds of dedicated advocates, investigators, and attorneys.

Reducing P&A funding is wasteful of taxpayer funds. Institutionalization is the most expensive, least effective method of providing support for people with disabilities. Reducing the budget of a program which protects against over-institutionalization will cost more in the long run, while causing great harm to individuals, their families, and their communities today.

The undersigned organizations work closely with P&A agencies. Below are some recent examples of how P&A work has protected the rights of children and adults with disabilities across the U.S.

Examples:

Maine

Disability Rights Maine (the Maine P&A) assisted a 27- year-old woman who was financially exploited and verbally abused by her private guardian. The guardian prohibited her from seeking employment which she valued and for which she was qualified, and from being administered the COVID vaccine which she requested. The guardian also took all but \$10/month of her SSI check for many years and yelled at her frequently. The P&A was successful in having guardianship terminated.

Tennessee

Disability Rights Tennessee (the Tennessee P&A), helped uncover the use of solitary confinement, pepper spray, and the physical assault of children and youth with disabilities held in state custody, a process that is now moving toward change.

Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Disability Law Center (the Oklahoma P&A) investigated abuse at a treatment facility for adults with intellectual disabilities and mental health conditions. There, staff allegedly used a bedsheet to choke a resident until he was unconscious, waited until the resident regained consciousness, and then beat him again. Other allegations include staff use of food to bribe residents to fight one another. As a result of P&A advocacy, a criminal investigation is underway and civil litigation is pending.

Washington

Disability Rights Washington (the Washington P&A) has led a years-long effort to combat abuse, neglect, and resident deaths at state-run facilities serving hundreds of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The P&A published investigation reports on one facility, Rainier School, in [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2021](#), that document allegations, such as a resident who disappeared into the night, staff kicking, punching, and physically assaulting patients, and a resident death caused by staff failure to comply with post-surgical instructions. In 2025, DRW worked with self-advocates and other partners to advocate for the closure of Rainier School. This advocacy resulted in a [bill that](#) passed the state legislature, which begins a structured closure of Rainier School and supports residents transitioning out of the program.

Not only do P&As *investigate abuse and neglect*, but they also *advocate for full inclusion of people* with disabilities in every aspect of the community.

Connecticut

Disability Rights Connecticut (the Connecticut P&A) continues its comprehensive advocacy to make sure people have the wheelchairs they need. The P&A serves on the state's [Wheelchair Repair Advisory Council](#) focused on reducing prior authorization requests and reducing wait times for power wheelchair repairs. These repair delays can leave individuals with mobility disabilities, including those who need to get out to work, homebound until they are fixed.

Washington

Disability Rights Washington (the Washington P&A) successfully worked with the state of Washington to prohibit employers from requiring a driver's license unless driving is an essential part of the job, thereby [removing unnecessary barriers to employment](#) for disabled people, who are much less likely to have driver's licenses than the general public.

New Mexico

Disability Rights New Mexico (DRNM) (the New Mexico P&A) has partnered with the state office of guardianship to train judges and court-appointed guardians *ad litem* on revisions to New Mexico's guardianship laws. This training includes education on techniques to identify and evaluate less restrictive alternatives, in order to permit the use of options that preserve independence whenever possible. Through these efforts, as well as DRNM's direct representation of individuals in both the trial and appellate courts, DRNM is working to reduce the number of unnecessary guardianships in New Mexico – protecting the autonomy and decision-making authority of older adults and people with disabilities.

As demonstrated by the examples above, P&A work is critically important, protecting children and adults with disabilities from discrimination and abuse. As they already operate with very limited finances, any reduction in funding will impact P&As' ability to do this work.

We urge the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to ensure that P&A programs avoid funding cuts. The protectors themselves must be protected.

Respectfully submitted,

Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)
Autism Society of America (ASA)
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Public Representation (CPR)
Children's Rights
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA)
Disability Rights and Education Fund (DREDF)
Justice in Aging (JIA)
Juvenile Law Center (JLC)
National Center for Youth Law (NCYL)
National Health Law Program (NHeLP)
Private Equity Stakeholder Project (PESP)
The ARC of the U.S.
Youth Law Center (YLC)