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January 11, 2018

Representative Sam Johnson
Chairman
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
2304 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Representative John Larson
Ranking Member
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
1501 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Larson:

On behalf of the Disability Law Center (DLC), the Massachusetts P&A, I write in strong support of H.R. 4547, the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017. Enactment of this legislation will provide critical protections for Social Security beneficiaries as well as needed reforms to the crucial representative payee program.

As the designated Protection and Advocacy organization in Massachusetts, we are an integral part of the disability community. Our core function is to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect including financial exploitation of individuals with disabilities throughout the state. We also monitor places where individuals with disabilities live and receive services to ensure we are being proactive in preventing abuse and neglect. However, our resources are limited and we can't help everyone that calls.

DLC hears from and talks to individuals with disabilities in our state all the time who are experiencing financial exploitation by the very people who are designated to oversee their finances and ensure that their rent and other bills are paid. Our state agency, the Disabled Persons Protection Commission, responsible for investigating abuse and neglect of adults with disabilities does not investigate financial exploitation despite the

The Protection and Advocacy System for Massachusetts



fact that the most calls they receive involve reports of financial exploitation by representative payees.

As you know, news stories, Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports, and hearings held by the House Ways and Means Committee have demonstrated the need for changes in the representative payee program. Your bipartisan legislation proposes many important and needed changes that will streamline the program as well as take important steps to increase oversight of the representative payee program by funding the nationwide network of P&A systems to monitor how representative payees are administering the Social Security funds received by beneficiaries.

In our work addressing financial exploitation by representative payees, we have found representative payees coercing individuals into making spending decisions that were in the best interest of the representative payee. In most cases, the representative payee is the provider paid by the state to house and take care of these folks. The individual and their families, who rely on this staff for everything, are usually in a difficult position to object to how or why the money is spent. Another concern is for individuals who are non-verbal, living in group homes or institutions, who aren't able to call us and tell us that their provider staff are misspending their funds. This bill would allow us to provide the appropriate monitoring and oversight necessary to ensure that these individuals have the same protections that others have.

We greatly appreciate the work you have both done on this important issue culminating in the introduction of this critical legislation. We stand ready to work with both of you to quickly get this important legislation enacted into law. Should you have any questions or need more information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Christine Griffin
Executive Director
Disability Law Center
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