April 28, 2020

Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli

New Jersey Department of Health

369 South Warren Street Trenton, New Jersey 08608

Re: Support person for person with a disability

Dear Commissioner Persichilli:

The Alliance Center for Independence would like to thank you for the new Department of Health policy regarding support for people with disabilities being treated for COVID-19 in hospitals. Detailed in your memo, dated April 25 to acute care hospitals, NJ DOH would permit people with disabilities to have a support person, with restrictions, with them during the length of their hospital stay.

While this policy is important in ensuring that some people with disabilities are getting the appropriate care while in a hospital, ACI is concerned the policy is limited. According to the policy, a person’s disability “……may be due to altered mental status, intellectual or cognitive disability, communication barriers or behavioral concerns.” This definition does not include individuals with physical disabilities, mental health diagnosed conditions or those with hearing and vision impairments and others limitations. These individuals also require support during their daily lives, so having that support during a hospital is vital.

Please consider broadening your policy to include other people with disabilities who need support during their hospital stay.

The Alliance Center for Independence is a non-profit 501(c)(3) disability organization based in Edison and assists over 3000 individuals and their families in Middlesex, Union and Somerset counties. Our mandate is serve all disabilities, including intellectual, mental health, physical and healthcare related disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Carole Tonks,

Executive Director