

Statement on Sexual Violence and Abuse The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to elevate the status of direct support professionals by improving practice standards; promoting system reform; and advancing their knowledge, skills and values. NADSP understands that abuse, neglect, and exploitation are serious issues in systems of services and support for people with disabilities. Decades of research suggest an ongoing crisis; there is an alarmingly high rate of physical abuse, neglect, and sexual victimization among those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, yet only a small fraction of these abuses are reported. An even smaller fraction of perpetrators are convicted. Studies have shown that people with developmental disabilities are 4 to 10 times more likely to experience abuse than do people without disabilities. People with more profound intellectual disabilities are particularly at risk.

A basic function of state government is to protect the most vulnerable among us, and the NADSP welcomes and encourages reforms to that end. The [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) and [National Public Radio](#) recently exposed abuse, neglect, badly explained deaths, and funding abnormalities within the institutional system serving people with developmental disabilities. These investigatory articles and their findings are cause for serious alarm.

NADSP commends the recent media pieces by the Philadelphia Inquirer and National Public Radio that have educated the general public on the issue of sexual assault and other abuse against children, youth, and adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. NADSP believes that even one case of abuse is one too many. However, "vigorously investigating and prosecuting abuse is like closing the barn door after the horse has bolted," says Joe Macbeth, the Executive Director of NADSP. Reforms focused solely on what happens after the abuse are short-sighted and will offer too little protection, too late, for people living with disabilities.

Abuse and neglect do not spontaneously occur in a vacuum; rather, they fester in cultures which do not value the dignity of the individuals receiving support and which pay insufficient attention to equitable wages and the professional skills required of those directly providing support. To reduce the likelihood of abuse occurring in the first place, cultural change is needed. NADSP hopes that the recent exposure can spearhead such change. NADSP will do its part to end abuse by supporting individuals with disabilities in achieving their life goals and by promoting the development of a highly competent, professional, direct support workforce.

NADSP advocates for reforms that develop a profession of skilled workers who are committed to their work and are necessary components of improvements in the lives of people with disabilities. The most important person in a caring service system is the person with the disability. But the second-most important person is the direct support staff who is often intimately involved in the life of the person with a disability.

Effective reform - solving the problems with service performance - must include reform among those who are doing the day-to-day work. These reforms include offering livable wages that are commensurate with the responsibilities of direct support professionals, ongoing professional development, and credentialing programs built on universal skills and a code of ethics. NADSP understands that the relationship between direct support professionals and individuals being supported is reciprocal - strengthening one strengthens the other. Reform in this domain must also recognize this reciprocity. America's direct support professionals must be given the training and skills to both prevent and identify areas of abuse and neglect. Individuals receiving supports

must also be provided the resources to identify and advocate for their well-being and security.

NADSP believes that by adequately supporting both sides of the service paradigm, meaningful and lasting change is possible.

Approved,
NADSP Board of Directors
February 20, 2018

About the NADSP: In 1996, NADSP's ideological founder, John F. Kennedy Jr. wrote "Quality is defined at the point of interaction between the staff member and the individual with a disability". Given this, NADSP's mission is to enhance the quality of support provided to people with disabilities through the provision of products, services, and certifications which elevate the status of direct support workers, improve practice standards, promote systems reform and, most importantly, advance the knowledge, skills, and values of direct support workers. For more information, please visit www.nadsp.org.

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