STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
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August 17, 2015

TO: Washington State Health Care Authority

FROM: Lou Oma Durand, Executive Director

RE: MEDICAID WAIVER COMMENTS

I am writing on behalf of the WA State Department of Services for the Blind to comment on the Washington State Draft Medicaid Transformation Waiver Application.

The Department of Services for the Blind Older Blind Independent Living Program serves senior adults with significant vision loss. We provide training, counseling and low cost technology to assist in adapting to vision loss and remaining independent in the community. None of these services are currently covered by Medicaid. All of these services are influential in reducing the need for in home supports and keeping these individuals out of long term care facilities until other health factors, other than vision, necessitate provision of long terms supports.

We believe that funding vision rehabilitation services that specifically relate to medical management, personal safety and mental health have made a difference for 1,500 WA citizens each year. Yet there are potentially five times that number who would benefit from these services if funding were available.

We believe that vision loss and the associated rehabilitation services should be considered among the targeted 20% of delivery system outputs that impact overall health as described in the application. This is because vision loss impacts a significantly high number of older individuals, and without appropriate rehabilitation, these individuals are at risk of significant physical and mental health complications.

We further believe that vision rehabilitation services should be included as part of the initiative on Tailored Supports for Older Adults. There are significant numbers of individuals with vision loss who currently do not qualify for Medicaid but who need vision rehabilitation in order to remain in the community and not be isolated in long term care facilities.

We are very interested in this initiative, and welcome the opportunity to be actively involved as programs move forward. We are also glad to provide any technical assistance regarding the nature and scope of vision rehabilitation services that might be appropriate to include in the application or in the grant implementation.