

April 15, 2024

United States Senate  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING  
Washington DC 205-10-6400

email: Doug\_Hartman@aging.senate.gov

Robert P. Casey, Pennsylvania, Chairman  
Kristen E. Gillibrand, New York  
Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut  
Elizabeth Warren, Massachusetts  
Mark Kelley, Arizona  
Raphael Warnock, Georgia  
John Fetterman, Pennsylvania

Mike Braun, Indiana, Ranking Member  
Marco Rubio, Florida  
Rick Scott, Florida  
J.D. Vance, Ohio  
Pete Ricketts, Nebraska

***Subject: Hoarding Disorder: From Crisis to Prevention, Securing Safety for Older Adults***

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging:

I sincerely thank you for your dedicated efforts to address the significant challenges that Hoarding Disorder (HD)<sup>1</sup> poses, particularly among older adults in the United States. As a Certified Senior Advisor (CSA®),<sup>2</sup> Certified Professional Organizer (CPO®),<sup>3</sup> and ICD Level III CPO-CD®,<sup>4</sup> the opportunity to share my insights and proposals with this committee marks a significant milestone in my career, fulfilling a long-held aspiration to influence policy and practice at a national level.

I am deeply grateful for this platform to advocate for strategic initiatives to transform our approach to managing the high incidence rates of hoarding disorder. In addition, as a committed Rotarian,<sup>5</sup> I embrace the "Service Before Self" principle, which acts as a compass in my professional and community engagements and guides me to improve lives through organized and mindful interventions, no matter how challenging.

As you explore this complicated topic further, I'd like to offer my testimony and be considered in an advisory role to implement the strategies presented below. You can rely on my neutral perspective, years of experience, knowledge, and respect for the international multidisciplinary experts in this specialized field. I am passionate about mitigating the financial and emotional suffering caused by hoarding behaviors. I am here to serve.

Since beginning my career at the age of 18, now 36 years later, I have amassed extensive experience with hoarding behavior case management across diverse socio-economic environments in the United States, serving the broadest range of clients you could imagine, including individuals, families (mainly adult

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

children), communities, homeowner associations, municipalities, housing courts, landlords, attorneys, insurance companies (home, auto, property, life), probate courts, clergy, family offices, trust companies and financial institutions, home care agencies, subsidized housing programs, state agencies for intellectual and developmental disabilities, real estate professionals, Health and Human Services, senior living communities, health care providers, rehabilitation facilities, outpatient and inpatient mental health programs, peer to peer programming, Medicare plans, Medicaid programs and more! This has afforded me a first-hand look across the country at how profound the effects that hoarding behaviors and co-occurring conditions<sup>6</sup> can have on society. This understanding highlights these disorders' broader social and emotional challenges,<sup>7</sup> especially in older adults.

Those in the field have witnessed a spectrum of distressing situations beyond the poor health and living conditions of older adults living with HD. What also comes with underreporting due to lack of insight or fear is far beyond the quantity and quality of accumulations; there is the substantial neglect of dwellings, vehicles, storage units, animals, children, siblings, spouses/partners, personal financial and legal affairs, their communities and the environment. As more households become multi-generational, cases are more complicated.

Becoming quite prevalent now is the number of older adults and adult children who inherit the living conditions from a spouse or loved one who suffered from HD and are left behind with limited resources because their personal affairs were not in order. Overall, older adults are becoming more tech-savvy. However, many cannot navigate the complexities of online health portals, online banking, and the ability to find home services online.

A few years ago, Mr. W asked me, "What is wwwdot?" Because he kept hearing it on the television and seeing it on his billing statements. He was left alone in squalor after his niece passed away. She was his caregiver; she suffered from clinical clutter. He said he was very grateful for her companionship, help writing out the checks and getting the groceries, but he tolerated her lifestyle. He fell and broke his hip shortly after she passed; the rehabilitation center called us in because they could not discharge him due to the condition of the apartment. We got him home and coordinated home care services, but he didn't know how to pay bills or handle other essential responsibilities that are now primarily tech-centric.

I've witnessed first responders risking their lives, social service case workers, clinicians, and other professionals struggling with insufficient and unestablished protocols or the necessary education to handle these complex cases effectively. Despite their best efforts, these well-meaning professionals often face significant challenges due to resource limitations.

We know some municipality agencies with established protocols may lack the funds or manpower to enforce them. More, however, face the ethical dilemma of creating homelessness for older adults as a consequence of their inhabitable living conditions if code enforcement is followed, only to find that by doing nothing, fires, and fatalities occur. The personal toll on individuals and families is immense; I've

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

seen families torn apart, marriages dissolved, suicide, accidental death, and instances of abuse from landlords, tenants, insurance companies, and even in the local court systems.

Over the years of traveling throughout the country, I have connected with some of the most dedicated professionals and private citizens I have ever met. Most of these individuals may not be widely published or recognized beyond their local areas, yet I was privileged to see the transformative impact they had on the lives they touched or their substantial contributions to this multidisciplinary field. Most of these are in the professional organizing industry. I cannot count how many selflessly volunteer their time on hoarding task forces or in local government to go that extra mile beyond the scope of their work because it's the right thing to do for the stakeholders involved.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the service providers, such as trauma cleanup crews and first responders, who play a critical role in these situations<sup>8</sup>. These professionals often face their own challenges, including injury, loss of life, serious infections, PTSD, and other related conditions due to their exposure to extreme circumstances while assisting individuals with hoarding behaviors. Amid these adversities, I have observed heroes in every profession who commit tirelessly to aid others.

However, alongside these commendable efforts, I've also seen troubling behavior from those expected to be trusted—family members, friends, attorneys, real estate professionals, medical personnel, veterinarians, financial professionals, court-appointed guardians, and yes, even my own colleagues—all whose actions or ignorance sometimes betray their responsibilities. These experiences only reinforced my commitment to advancing effective interventions and solutions to address these challenges at individual and systemic levels.

My professional journey mirrors the significant evolution within the professional organizing industry over the past forty-plus years. Originating as a self-taught and self-regulating field, it has attracted highly intelligent and empathetic individuals, many born naturally gifted problem solvers, educators, caregivers, and resourceful project managers.

This industry has been pivotal in founding volunteer-run organizations such as the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals® (NAPO) and the Institute for Challenging Disorganization® (ICD), whose members are committed to advancing the field through continuous education and professional development. We owe a debt of gratitude to the founders and the countless volunteers who have dedicated themselves to this industry.

Notable international researchers and clinicians such as Randy Frost,<sup>9</sup> Gail Stekitee,<sup>10</sup> David Tolin,<sup>11</sup> Christiana Bratiotis,<sup>12</sup> Ari Tuckman,<sup>13</sup> Russell Barkley,<sup>14</sup> and Suzanne Chabaud<sup>15</sup> are just a few who have recognized the high quality of education and field experience our industry members have cultivated, supported, and advanced. Many have been our keynote speakers over the years and/or written a Foreword or endorsed countless industry authors' books. Our industry has rapidly evolved as consumer

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

demand has increased alongside the population increase of older adults, leading many professionals to specialize further. Some have embraced roles as coaches, social workers, clinicians, and researchers, addressing complex issues beyond characteristics of hoarding behaviors and co-occurring conditions.

There is no denying that cable television shows like "Hoarders: Buried Alive"<sup>16</sup> and "Hoarders"<sup>17</sup> contributed to the significant growth of increasing consumer demand and rising awareness. These programs have captured the public's attention and underscored the profound impact of hoarding behaviors and the critical role that professional organizers play in addressing such challenges.

As someone deeply involved in shaping the dialogue around hoarding behaviors, I was compensated as an advisory consultant for both shows during pilot development. While I continue to decline to participate on camera for these and other reality television programs, I firmly believe in the importance of these shows, as they highlight our work as professional organizers and promote consumer awareness.

Driven by a deep curiosity and a desire to find a universal language to mitigate hoarding disorder in our country, over the years, I have expanded my scope, exploring a self-educated journey and learning of "best practices" of specialized groups such as the Society of Certified Senior Advisors (CSA),<sup>18</sup> American Bio Recovery Association (ABRA),<sup>19</sup> International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA),<sup>20</sup> Institute of Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration Certification (IICRC),<sup>21</sup> International OCD Foundation (IOCDF),<sup>22</sup> Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD),<sup>23</sup> National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM),<sup>24</sup> American Association of Daily Money Managers (AADMM),<sup>25</sup> Indoor Air Quality Association (IAQA),<sup>26</sup> American Psychological Association (APA),<sup>27</sup> National Association of Social Workers (NASW),<sup>28</sup> Restoration Industry Association (RIA),<sup>29</sup> and several more. My philanthropic involvement with the Glenn Biggs Institute for Alzheimer's & Neurodegenerative Diseases<sup>30</sup> and the Brain Bank at UT Health San Antonio underscores my commitment to advancing research and interventions that significantly affect brain health in older adults<sup>31</sup>.

Today, I submit proposals with specific objectives and implementation plans to tackle our immediate challenges. The benefits include developing a "standard of care," universal language, protocols, and policies while enhancing protections for all vulnerable parties involved. More critically, they aim to foster a systematic approach toward **preventing** HD across the United States.

These ideas promise relief to those directly affected by HD and other co-occurring conditions that affect older adults, particularly for those with adult children, siblings, spouses, and partners who often bear the brunt of this struggle. First responders, too, will find solace in this approach. By reducing the incidence of severe hoarding cases, we alleviate the heavy burden on these critical teams, allowing them more capacity to address other community needs.

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

Almost immediately, parts of these proposals can be implemented to address crisis cases nationwide. The topics of the proposals are below, with a more expansive outline attached:

- **Establishment of a National Hoarding Task Force:** This will serve as the central coordinating body to oversee the implementation of strategies and policies nationwide, ensuring consistency and the highest standards of care and intervention. We would see how other countries address HD and openly share our findings. The practice of an integrative and collaborative approach starts here.
- **Utilization of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT):<sup>32</sup> for Enhancing HD Intervention Strategies:** By integrating HD into CERT programs, we can leverage existing emergency response frameworks to provide immediate support and intervention in hoarding situations, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of responses at the community level. We would develop a short training practicum that would quickly be adopted into the training modules.
- **Adaptation of the 'Money Follows the Person' Model:<sup>33</sup> to facilitate transitions for individuals living with or a result of hoarding behaviors by others:** This model will be specifically tailored to support individuals affected by HD, ensuring they have the necessary resources and support to transition safely from uninhabitable conditions to community-based supervised and therapeutic independent living, while maintaining autonomy and ownership of personal and real property, thereby promoting long-term recovery and stability.
- **Development of Education and Licensing Program for Professional Organizers (LPO):** This program will set educational and professional standards to address hoarding behaviors and other co-occurring conditions resulting in clinical clutter, from early onset to advanced crisis. Professional organizers already bring specialized skills to the field, but an LPO as an allied health professional would be the pathway for accepting health insurance and creating a means to assist more in need in the private sector.
- **Help facilitate recognition of the professional organizing industry and related fields with a specific NAICS Code<sup>34</sup>:** The benefits of obtaining the industry-specific NAICS codes are critical to the integrated facets of practitioner and consumer protection. A designated NAICS code can help businesses identify and prove eligibility for these financial aids and qualify for government grants and loans. Perhaps most relevant to this committee is government contracting; when collaborating with professional organizers at the municipality level, NAICS codes classify the types of goods and services purchased by the government. One of the most significant benefits to the industry and consumers is that insurance companies use NAICS codes to classify risk types associated with different business activities affecting insurance premiums and coverage options.

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

The importance of this profession cannot be overstated. Professional organizers equip individuals with critical skills and modify settings to better accommodate physical and mental health challenges, significantly enhancing well-being. Their interdisciplinary collaborations extend their influence, supporting professionals across various fields dedicated to improving human health while being mindful of a sustainable environment.

This role is essential, highlighting professional organizers as pivotal contributors to our efforts to build more adaptive and resilient communities. As Senators, I ask that you see the value in legislating support and recognition for this industry to ensure that professional organizers can continue to contribute significantly to public health and safety.

In conclusion, this approach is not just about reducing the prevalence of hoarding behaviors and co-occurring conditions; it's about building a sustainable model of care that creates jobs that cannot be automated—jobs that require the human touch, empathy, and understanding. It's about the elegance of mobilizing communities to support their most vulnerable members, particularly when they need it the most. Amidst the lingering shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated the challenges of accumulation and isolation, our communities have seen an increasing need for such support.

Moreover, when tested against the Rotary Four-Way Test<sup>35</sup>—***Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?***—this initiative passes with flying colors. It is a truthful, fair, and beneficial strategy that builds goodwill across generations and professions.

Thank you for your attentive and foresighted participation in this matter. I trust that the Special Committee on Aging agrees this is not merely a health initiative but a critical step toward a more inclusive society caring for older adults and others impacted by hoarding behaviors and co-occurring conditions resulting in clinical clutter. Together, we can cultivate a healthier, safer, and inherently sustainable future for all. I look forward to your response and learning how to help further.

Sincerely,

*Melissa Hladek*

Melissa Hladek, Advocate  
CSA®, CPO®, CPO-CD®  
860-866-7141

## ***Hoarding Disorder: From Crisis to Prevention, Securing Safety for Older Adults - Comprehensive Approach and Overview of First Steps***

These initiatives represent a concerted effort to fundamentally alter our approach to hoarding behaviors. By adopting these measures, we aim to transition from a reactive model, which merely responds to crises as they occur, to a proactive prevention strategy that significantly reduces the incidence of clinical clutter in our communities. Your support is crucial; it represents a pivotal move towards a more compassionate and effective method of addressing one of the most under-recognized mental health and environmental safety concerns.

Below are the preliminary steps of this strategy, presented in broad strokes. There is no denying that considerable effort is required to bring these plans to fruition. Yet, intriguingly, most components are already at our disposal—it's merely a question of assembly. And who better to help orchestrate such an endeavor than professional organizers? After all, arranging complex pieces into a coherent whole is quite literally in our job description!

**Establishment of a National Hoarding Disorder (HD) Task Force:** This proposed task force is designed to tackle Hoarding Disorder through a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach that includes innovation, standardized treatment, and extensive public education. The task force will comprise experts in research, psychology, social work, public health, public safety (including fire and police), law, building code enforcement (including animal control), and professional organizing, ensuring a well-rounded strategy to address HD from all necessary perspectives.

***Proposed Mission Statement:*** The mission is to enhance collaboration and support among professionals and associations dealing with HD. By highlighting successful interventions, creating robust networks across local, city, and state levels, and providing essential resources like toolkits and training programs, the task force aims to foster a well-informed and resilient community of practitioners. The overarching goals are to encourage the adoption of effective intervention strategies, improve the quality and effectiveness of services, and significantly enhance outcomes for individuals affected by HD. This initiative is poised to bolster professional connections, elevate competence in managing HD cases, and improve service delivery through shared expertise and resources. Each day, we are driven by our goal to transition from a crisis response model to one of prevention, measuring our success by the significant reduction in the incidence rates of Hoarding Disorder. Ultimately, our vision is for this task force to become unnecessary, aiming for a future where the prevalence of Hoarding Disorder as we see it today is dramatically reduced, marking our ultimate success.

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

**Scope and Activities:**

- *Standardization of Solutions:* Develop and implement nationwide standardized treatment and intervention strategies.
- *Data Management:* Oversee the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data concerning the prevalence and impact of HD.
- *Education and Outreach:* Conduct comprehensive public education campaigns to increase awareness and understanding of HD, utilizing tools from the IOCDF and ICD. The campaigns aim to reduce stigma and inform about available help.

**Goals:**

- Create a unified national strategy for HD intervention.
- Standardize and enhance the effectiveness of treatment methodologies across all states.
- Foster public and professional understanding of HD through educational programs.

**Expected Impact:**

- Increased accessibility and effectiveness of treatments for HD.
- Reduced incidence and severity of HD through preventive measures and early interventions.
- Improved societal and community responses to HD cases.

➤ **Utilization of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT): Enhancing HD Intervention**

**Strategies:** Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), established under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), have a proven track record in preparing local volunteers to respond to emergencies in their communities. These teams are crucial in the initial response to disasters, helping to provide immediate assistance to victims, organizing volunteers, and collecting disaster intelligence to support first responders. The structure and success of the CERT program offer a robust foundation for integrating additional training modules, specifically tailored to address Hoarding Disorder (HD).

**Rationale for Integration of HD Education into CERT**

The integration of HD education into CERT training is both logical and strategic, given the complex challenges posed by severe hoarding situations. Hoarding scenarios can often mimic disaster environments characterized by high levels of clutter that pose significant risks for fire, structural hazards, and health complications for occupants and responders alike. By equipping CERT members with specialized knowledge and strategies to handle HD, we enhance their capability to manage these risks effectively, ensuring safety and improving outcomes for all involved.

**Benefits of HD Training for CERT Programs**

*Enhanced Safety Protocols:* Training CERT volunteers in HD-specific intervention strategies will equip them to navigate cluttered environments safely, recognize potential hazards, and manage them appropriately before they escalate into more severe emergencies.



*Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness:* With specialized training in HD, CERT members can assess a hoarding situation more quickly, leading to faster and more coordinated responses. This can significantly decrease traditional emergency services' workload and increase community resilience.

*Community-Specific Outreach and Support:* Integrating HD education allows CERT programs to expand their community support roles, particularly in providing targeted assistance to individuals struggling with hoarding behaviors. This proactive approach can help mitigate the long-term impacts of hoarding by addressing them before they require urgent intervention.

*Resource Optimization:* By understanding the specific needs and challenges of hoarding interventions, CERT teams can better allocate their resources, whether directing individuals to appropriate mental health services, assisting with clutter remediation, or working alongside professional organizers and health professionals.

*Strengthened Local Networks:* Training in HD will enable CERT members to serve as liaisons between people with hoarding behaviors, their families, and relevant local agencies. This role is crucial in building a supportive network that encourages sustainable management of hoarding behaviors and co-occurring conditions.

### **Implementation Strategy**

The implementation of HD training within the CERT program could follow a phased approach, starting with pilot programs in communities with high incidences of HD. Education materials and training modules can be developed with hoarding specialists, psychologists, biohazard experts, and professional organizers to ensure they are comprehensive and practical. Feedback from these pilot programs would be instrumental in refining the training materials before a broader rollout.

By adopting this integrated approach, the CERT program can significantly enhance its impact, extending beyond traditional disaster response to address complex social issues such as Hoarding Disorder. This broadens the scope and capabilities of CERT volunteers and provides critical, immediate support in severe hoarding situations, ultimately contributing to safer and more resilient communities.

- **Adaptation of the 'Money Follows the Person' Model: Facilitating Transitions for Individuals with Hoarding Disorder:** The "Money Follows the Person" (MFP) model, originally designed to transition individuals from institutional settings to community-based environments in a manner that aligns financial support with the individual's choice, offers a compelling framework for addressing Hoarding Disorder (HD). By adapting this model, we can effectively support individuals in transitioning from unsafe and unhealthy living conditions due to severe hoarding to safer, more manageable environments, thereby enhancing their independence and overall quality of life.

***Rationale for Adapting MFP to Hoarding Disorder***

Hoarding Disorder often results in living conditions that pose significant health and safety risks not only to the individual but also to the community. These environments can become akin to institutional settings in their restrictions on normal activities and quality of life due to clutter and unsanitary conditions. Adapting the MFP model to hoarding interventions allows for the redirection of resources to support decluttering, cleaning, and organizing services in a way that respects the individual's autonomy and promotes sustainable improvements.

***Benefits of Applying the MFP Model to Hoarding Disorder***

**Enhanced Independence:** By providing financial and logistical support for decluttering, skills training when applicable, and home modifications, individuals can regain control of their living spaces and lead independent lives within their communities.

**Improved Health and Safety:** Transitioning to a decluttered and organized environment reduces the risk of falls, injuries, and other health complications associated with hoarding. It also mitigates the hazards that can lead to emergency interventions, such as fires and fatalities.

**Sustainable Living Conditions:** The MFP model emphasizes the physical transition to safer environments and the ongoing support necessary to maintain those conditions. This can include funding for regular check-ins by professional organizers for support and skills training and mental health professionals to ensure the environment remains safe and manageable.

**Community Integration:** Individuals with HD often isolate themselves due to shame or fear of eviction. By providing the means to restore their homes to a livable state, the MFP model helps reintegrate them into the community, enhancing social connections and support. Homeowners can return to their homes, and management of personal property once all inspections are passed.

**Cost-Effectiveness:** Investing in upfront transitional support can prevent more costly interventions later, such as emergency room visits, long-term institutionalization, repeated clean-ups by local authorities, extended municipality resources, and adding more cases to court dockets.

**Implementation Strategy**

Implementing the MFP model for HD could involve several key steps:

**Assessment and Planning:** Each case of HD would start with a comprehensive assessment to create a personalized transition plan that addresses both immediate clutter removal and long-term management strategies.

**Funding Allocation:** Funds would be allocated for physical clean-up, including biohazard specialists and/or professional organizers, restoration contractors with a CAPS (Certified Aging in Place

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

Specialist) designation, mental health support, and a therapeutic approach to address the underlying causes of hoarding (this can include transportation to peer-to-peer support or Clutter's Anonymous).

*Service Coordination:* A case manager would coordinate various services, including professional organizing, mental health counseling, and home repair, ensuring that resources are used effectively and that the individual receives holistic support.

*Follow-Up and Adjustment:* Regular follow-ups would be conducted to ensure the home remains safe and to adjust the support plan as needed, fostering long-term success in managing hoarding behaviors. The follow-up period would be a minimum of 5 years on a quarterly basis, given the statistics of a near 100% recidivism rate for HD.

By adapting the "Money Follows the Person" model to Hoarding Disorder, we can create a supportive pathway that respects individual needs while addressing the complex challenges of HD, ultimately leading to better outcomes for individuals and their communities.

- **Development of a Specialized Educational and Licensing Program for Professional Organizers:** . The professional organizing industry is at a crucial juncture, ready to formalize its educational structure by developing a specialized educational and licensing program. This initiative would draw upon a wealth of educational resources from respected organizations such as the Institute for Challenging Disorganization (ICD), the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals (NAPO), the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM)<sup>36</sup>, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD), and the International OCD Foundation (IOCDF). The goal is to establish a robust two-year degree program in trade schools and colleges, ensuring accessibility and superior education for future professional organizers. This program is designed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively collaborate with healthcare providers in addressing the complex needs of clients with Hoarding Disorder (HD) and related conditions.

To ensure that these educational standards are maintained and that consumer protection is paramount, the establishment of a governing body, the Board of Licensing for Professional Organizers (BLPO), is proposed. The BLPO would be responsible for upholding the industry's educational excellence and ethical standards.

Moreover, professional organizing should be recognized as an allied health<sup>37</sup> profession. This recognition is vital because professional organizers play a critical role in improving individuals' mental and physical well-being by creating organized, stress-free, safe, and ergonomically friendly environments. This can significantly impact individuals with physical and mental health challenges, particularly older adults suffering from HD, making it imperative that professional organizing be integrated into the broader healthcare system. Establishing this profession as part of the allied

health field will underscore its importance and ensure it receives the recognition and resources necessary to serve the community effectively.

### ***Integrating Industry Standards (Sample)***

We propose incorporating the guidelines and best practices from specialty areas to ensure that this educational program meets the highest standards of professionalism and efficacy. The Institute of Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration Certification (IICRC) and the American Bio Recovery Association (ABRA) are two examples. Both organizations set rigorous standards for cleaning and restoration, which can be adapted to the specific challenges of hoarding cleanup and maintenance.

*IICRC Standards:* The IICRC provides globally recognized standards for cleaning and restoration. Integrating these standards into the curriculum details the complexities of deep cleaning and restoration needed in severe hoarding situations, focusing on safety, effectiveness, and ethical considerations.

*ABRA Guidelines:* ABRA specializes in bio-recovery and has developed essential protocols where hoarding intersects with biohazards. Educating in these guidelines will prepare them to handle the most challenging environments safely and effectively, respecting both the client's well-being and public health guidelines.

*Please refer to this article for the direction the field needs to go: Creates Pathways to Stronger Consumer Protection through Regulation Example: Georgia Clean<sup>38</sup>, and House Bill 417<sup>39</sup>*

### **Curriculum Development (Sample)**

This sample curriculum is designed to be robust, covering a broad array of relevant topics to ensure graduates are well-prepared to handle various aspects of professional organizing, from technical skills like digital organizing to understanding complex legal and psychological issues. This diverse educational approach would prepare students to operate effectively across different environments, addressing their clients' practical and emotional needs.

The proposed two-year degree (LPO) and may have additional components and floating electives to be modified to fit current consumer and practitioner needs. The Curriculum Sample is shown below.

### ***Potential Additional Components***

- Probate Court and Terminal Illnesses - Workshops/Seminars
- Productivity Arts - Elective Courses, Learning Styles 101<sup>40</sup>
- Continuing Education - Ongoing seminars and certifications post-graduation to ensure skills remain up-to-date.

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

**LPO Curriculum 2-Year Degree (Sample)**

Year 1	Year 2
<p><b>Fall Semester</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Introduction to Professional Organizing - (3 Credits)</b> Overview of the field, history of home economics and professional organizing. Introduction to basic organizing principles and the professional scope.</li> <li>• <b>Business Communications - (3 Credits)</b> Effective communication strategies, professional writing, and client relations.</li> <li>• <b>Environmental Science and Indoor Air Quality (IAQA) - (3 Credits)</b> Basics of environmental science, focusing on indoor environments, IAQA, and biohazard/crime scene cleanup.</li> <li>• <b>Ethics in Professional Organizing - (3 Credits)</b> Study of business ethics related to organizing, confidentiality, and client interactions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fall Semester</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Human Development and Aging - (3 Credits)</b> Study of lifespan development, focusing on aging populations and related organizing needs.</li> <li>• <b>Family Dynamics and Systems - (3 Credits)</b> Understanding family structures, dynamics, and the impact on organizing practices.</li> <li>• <b>Neurodegenerative Diseases &amp; Brain Health - (3 Credits)</b> Exploration of brain health, imaging, and the impacts of life-span disorders like ADHD and ASD on organizing needs.</li> <li>• <b>Real Estate, Insurance, &amp; Home Finance - (3 Credits)</b> The interplay between organizing, real estate management, insurance policies, and home finance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Spring Semester</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Building Code, Fire Code, and Sanitation - (3 Credits)</b> Comprehensive study of relevant building codes, fire safety, and sanitation regulations.</li> <li>• <b>Public Health Administration - (3 Credits)</b> Understanding public health principles, focusing on community health and CDC guidelines.</li> <li>• <b>Digital and Virtual Organizing - (3 Credits)</b> Techniques and tools for digital organizing (photo/files). Learn virtual platforms for client engagement.</li> <li>• <b>Estate Planning and Taxes 101 - (3 Credits)</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Spring Semester</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health Professionals &amp; Collaborative Therapy - (3 Credits)</b> Integrating organizing services with health professionals and exploring collaborative therapies.</li> <li>• <b>Abnormal Psychology and Disorganization - (3 Credits)</b> Deep dive into psychological disorders related to disorganization, including hoarding behaviors and compulsive shopping.</li> <li>• <b>Health Insurance and Medical Coding - (3 Credits)</b> Understanding global health insurance systems, DSM-V, and ICD-10 coding systems.</li> </ul>

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

<p>Basics of estate planning, understanding wills, trusts, and tax implications for clients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Capstone: Final Project and Case Study Analysis - (3 Credits)</b> Application of learned principles in a comprehensive case study or project that addresses a real-world scenario.</li> </ul>
--	---

**Support and Recognition**

To realize this vision, we seek guidance and funding to formalize an advisory committee and develop this program into a recognized educational pathway. Achieving accreditation for the program will elevate the profession's status and credibility, making it a viable career choice recognized by academic institutions and health professionals. Furthermore, official recognition will facilitate the integration of professional organizing into mental health and public health strategies, enhancing the support network available for individuals not only with HD, but so many more physical and mental health conditions that older adults face. With a formal designation for professional organizers (LPO designation), we can ensure that seniors and their families, who may be the caregivers<sup>41</sup>, can better organize and prepare their living spaces for a *safer* standard of living and more comfortable lives.

➤ **Formal Recognition of Professional Organizing as an Allied Health Profession with a NAICS Code:**

The initiative to formally recognize Professional Organizing as an Allied Health Profession and assign it a specific NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) code aims to elevate the profession within the economic and regulatory frameworks. This formal recognition is essential for advancing the profession, improving standards, and enhancing the credibility and visibility of professional organizers within the healthcare and public service sectors.

*Benefits of Formal Recognition:*

**Enhanced Visibility and Credibility:** Establishing a NAICS code for Professional Organizing legitimizes the profession, placing it on equal footing with other recognized health and allied services. This increased visibility fosters broader acceptance and integration of professional organizing services within health and social services.

The benefits of obtaining the industry-specific NAICS codes are critical to the integrated facets of practitioner and consumer protection. A designated NAICS code can help businesses identify and prove eligibility for these financial aids and qualify for government grants and loans. Perhaps most relevant to this committee is government contracting; when collaborating with professional organizers at the municipality level, NAICS codes classify the types of goods and services purchased by the government. One of the most significant benefits to the industry and consumers is that insurance companies use NAICS codes to classify risk types associated with different business activities affecting insurance premiums and coverage options. NAICS codes help companies identify

relevant regulations and categorize businesses for tax purposes; some practitioners may qualify for tax credits or deductions.

Lastly, a designated NAICS code creates jobs by offering opportunities for full-time employment in the local government sector, the personal and real property insurance industry, school districts, home healthcare agencies, senior living communities, the financial sector, and private healthcare providers, just to name a few.

*Improved Data Collection and Research:* Formal recognition facilitates systematic data collection about the industry, which can drive policy decisions, support academic research, and inform training and educational programs. Better data contributes to a deeper understanding of the market needs and the effectiveness of organizing interventions.

*Regulation and Professional Development:* Assigning a NAICS code enables consistent regulation across jurisdictions, enhancing service quality and consistency. It also helps define pathways for professional development, setting benchmarks for education, training, and practice that are recognized universally within the industry.

*Consumer Protection:* Formal recognition helps set clear service quality standards, which protect consumers by ensuring they receive services from qualified professionals. This is crucial in building trust and ensuring that interventions are carried out ethically and effectively.

*Professional Liability Insurance:* With formal recognition, professional organizers can obtain comprehensive professional liability insurance more efficiently, protecting practitioners and their clients. Insurance availability is critical in safeguarding practices against potential legal claims and providing a safety net supporting ethical decision-making and professional conduct.

*Support for Legislative Advocacy:* Formal recognition empowers professional organizing bodies to advocate more effectively for legislative changes that support the profession's growth and integration into health and social systems. This can lead to more substantial support, funding opportunities, and an influential voice in policy discussions related to mental health, public health, and consumer protection.

*Strategic Actions for Implementation:*

*Stakeholder Engagement:* Collaborate with key stakeholders, including professional organizers, healthcare providers, and regulatory authorities, to build consensus and support for the NAICS classification.

*Regulatory Consultation:* Work with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and relevant economic agencies to define the scope and parameters of the professional organizing industry for inclusion in the NAICS.

*Public Awareness Campaigns:* Conduct educational campaigns to inform the public, policymakers, and other professionals about the benefits of professional organizing as an Allied Health Profession.

*Continuous Professional Development:* Develop and maintain ongoing education and certification programs that adhere to the standards expected of recognized allied health professions.

The formal recognition of Professional Organizing as an Allied Health Profession with an assigned NAICS code marks a significant step forward in professionalizing the field, enhancing service quality, protecting consumers, and ensuring the industry's growth and sustainability.

Establishing a groundbreaking framework that recognizes and fully integrates professional organizers' essential services into our healthcare system will relieve pressures on healthcare providers and consumers and pave the way for proactive, preventative solutions.

In conclusion, the initiatives outlined in this report offer a blueprint for a transformative approach to managing HD. By shifting from a reactive to a proactive stance, we can fundamentally alter the landscape of mental health intervention in our communities. The road ahead requires diligence and coordinated effort, but we are well-prepared to make meaningful progress with the tools and strategies already within our grasp. I sincerely hope that the insights provided here will galvanize support and inspire action, leading to substantial reductions in the incidence of HD.

The collaboration of professional organizers will be instrumental in this process, leveraging their unique skills to ensure the successful implementation of these vital measures. Together, we can create a future where HD is managed and prevented while fostering a healthier society and environment.

-end



## Endnotes and References

- <sup>1</sup> <https://icdlist.com/icd-10/F42.3>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.csa.us/certification/>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.napo.net/general/custom.asp?page=Certification>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.challengingdisorganization.org/level-iii-cpo-cd->
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary>
- <sup>6</sup> Bates, S., Chang, W. C., Hamilton, C. E., & Chasson, G. S. (2021). Hoarding disorder and co-occurring medical conditions: A systematic review. *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*, 30, 100661. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jocrd.2021.100661>
- <sup>7</sup> Akbari, M., Seydavi, M., Mohammadkhani, S., Turchmanovych, N., Chasson, G. S., Majlesi, N., Hajialiani, V., & Askari, T. (2022). Emotion dysregulation and hoarding symptoms: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 78(7), 1341–1353. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23318>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=firefighter+dies+in+hoard&type=E210US105G0#id=0&vid=fe112d89031f07275e0d9f3d82ef3d1d&action=click>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.smith.edu/people/andy-o-frost>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.bu.edu/ssw/profile/gail-steketee/>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://drtolin.com/>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://christianabratiotis.com/>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://tuckmanpsych.com/>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.russellbarkley.org/>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/suzanne-chabaud-metairie-la/78911>
- <sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoarding:\\_Buried\\_Alive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoarding:_Buried_Alive)
- <sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoarders\\_\(TV\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoarders_(TV_series))
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.csa.us/certification/>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.americanbiorecovery.org/>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://events.issa.com/events/iicrc-house-cleaning-technician-hct-certification-program-april-2024/>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://iicrc.org/abouttheiicrc/>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://iocdf.org/>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://chadd.org/>
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.nasmm.org/>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://secure.aadmm.com/>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://iaqa.org/program/>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://www.apa.org/>
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.socialworkers.org/>
- <sup>29</sup> <https://www.restorationindustry.org/>
- <sup>30</sup> <https://biggsinstitute.org/>
- <sup>31</sup> <https://news.uthscsa.edu/the-center-for-brain-health-opening-in-2024-25/>
- <sup>32</sup> [https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en\\_US](https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/welcome-to-cert?language=en_US)
- <sup>33</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CMR-HE22-00186251>
- <sup>34</sup> <https://www.naics.com/>
- <sup>35</sup> <https://my.rotary.org/en/guiding-principles>
- <sup>36</sup> <https://www.nasmm.org/>

★Professional Organizing★Hoarding Remediation & Aftercare Services★Senior Care Advising★Estate Management★Expert Witness★Litigation Support★Court Appointed(Housing/Probate)★Tax & Insurance Claim Support★Packouts  
★Aging-in-Place★Specialty Relocations★Collectible Advising/Home Liquidation

---

<sup>37</sup> Clarke C. (2019). Can Occupational Therapy Address the Occupational Implications of Hoarding?. Occupational therapy international, 2019, 5347403. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2019/5347403>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.georgiaclean.com/georgia-clean-celebrates-the-new-law-regulating-crime-scene-cleanup-industry/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/55271>

<sup>40</sup> Processing Modalities Guide: Identify and Use Specific Strengths for Better Functioning ... for Organizers, Coaches – and Those Who Want to Live with More Ease and Effectiveness – and Less Frustration, 2013, 2nd Edition

<sup>41</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.01.023>