
Governmental Affairs Update

In the month of March, The Arc of New Jersey celebrated Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, testified at multiple legislative hearings, weighed in on a number of I/DD related bills and advocated on the FY20 Budget. The Arc of New Jersey's Executive Director Tom Baffuto testified alongside Lauren Zalepka, a family member whose daughter receives services from The Arc of Monmouth, at both the Senate and Assembly Budget hearings last month. Testimony was focused on the Direct Support Professional workforce crisis and the need to keep starting salaries above the state minimum wage which is set to rise in July 2019 and again in January 2020. Lauren's testimony to Committee members illustrated the important role DSPs play in the life of her daughter and why the state must act to ensure families like hers will continue to have the staff they depend on. The Arc of New Jersey continues to be an active member of the Coalition for a DSP Living Wage and will continue advocating through the end of the fiscal year. Also testifying at the hearings was Renee and Kyle, members of the NJ Self-Advocacy Network, who gave lawmakers the self-advocate perspective on the DSP workforce crisis.

Earlier in the month, The Arc of New Jersey celebrated Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month with more than 40 Self-Advocates at Goldfinch Square in the State House, and both Tom and Evelyn Ramundo, president of the New Jersey Self-Advocacy Network, testified before the Assembly Transportation Committee about the transportation difficulties and challenges for people with disabilities living in New Jersey. Also in March, Tom testified before the Assembly Human Services Committee, to discuss the challenges facing individuals with dual diagnosis. Tom explained that individuals who have dual diagnosis have both intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health challenges and they require unique and specific supports to help them live successfully in the community. His testimony included recommendations and educated Committee members about current services.

As for legislation, The Arc of New Jersey supported a number of bills making their way through the legislative process. This included a proposal to establish a bill of rights for family members, another which revises the newborn screening program and another that will require the Department of Human Services to study emergency response services for individuals with I/DD. Our organization also supported legislation that will create a Task Force on Maximizing Employment for People with Disabilities. Should this bill be signed into law, The Arc of New Jersey is among the named members of the task force.