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## Governmental Affairs Update

Governor Murphy delivered his annual Budget Address last week and we're very happy to report that the proposed State Fiscal Year '21 Budget includes funding to address two very important issues for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities:

- *wages for Direct Support Professionals and*
- *Day Program Rates.*

Specifically, the Governor's proposed budget includes:

- **\$42 million (state and federal dollars)** toward DSP wages to keep these workers' wages ahead of the rising minimum wage.
- **\$20 million (state and federal dollars)** to address day program rates. Right now, providers do not receive any payment when a person is absent from their day program. This funding recognizes the financial effects of absences and helps to address the issue so providers can continue to provide quality services to people with I/DD.

The Arc of New Jersey thanks all of the family members, self-advocates and Local County Chapters who were a pivotal part of our advocacy efforts. Whether it was participating in action alerts, speaking to elected officials, attending events at the State House, or educating members of the Administration on why these issues are so important to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Leading up to the Governor's Budget Address, The Arc of New Jersey advocated with both the Governor and members of the Administration regarding funding levels for the upcoming fiscal year. This included testifying at departmental listening sessions, meeting with members of the Administration, corresponding with the Governor and working alongside our partners in the Coalition for a DSP Living Wage.

In February, Executive Director Tom Baffuto testified at the Department of Health's (DOH) Budget Listening Session in support of increased rates for the Early Intervention System. Rates for these critical services have not gone up in 15 years and Tom outlined for the Commissioner and her team, why more funding is needed to ensure the availability of practitioners and therapists. In February we also met with top-ranking members of DOH, along with The Arc of Essex County, about the need to increase rates.

Tom also testified before the Senate Budget Committee last month in support of Senate Bill 1194 which appropriates funding in the current State Budget to increase wages for Direct Support Professionals. The need for this bill is especially important in light of the recent increase to the state's minimum wage which went into effect in January. The Arc of New Jersey has been

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advocating for this supplemental appropriation as we continue our work as a member of the Coalition for a DSP Living Wage.

In other legislative news, The Arc of New Jersey testified before the Assembly Human Services Committee last month in support of A860 which establishes a Task Force on Supportive Technology for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities. The Task Force is charged with studying opportunities for the expanded use of supportive technology for individuals with developmental disabilities and providing recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature on how the use of supportive technology can improve lives. The Arc of New Jersey is honored to be a named member of the Task Force. The legislation was voted out of Committee and then approved by the full Assembly on February 24. The bill must now be heard in the Senate before it can head to the Governor's desk.