
Governmental Affairs Update

Last month, The Arc of New Jersey and representatives from local County Chapters headed to Washington for the Disability Policy Seminar and to advocate on the Hill with the state's federal lawmakers and their legislative staff. The Arc of New Jersey, along with First Vice President Kevin Sturges, was joined by families, self-advocates and representatives from local County Chapters including Bergen & Passaic, Camden, Warren and Union. This trip gives individuals with I/DD and their families the chance to share their personal stories with decision-makers in Washington. Topics included the importance of Medicaid and long term supports and services, the Money Follows the Person Program, and the ABLE Age Adjustment Act. A highlight of the day included a meeting with Congressman Frank Pallone, Chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee, which legislates on many of the matters our organization cares about.

Also during the month of April, The Arc of New Jersey met with a number of state lawmakers who serve on the Senate and Assembly Budget Committees. We continue to advocate for increased wages for the Direct Support Professional workforce and remain an active member of the Coalition for a DSP Living Wage. These one-on-one meetings are a chance to speak with legislators about the importance of DSPs, the impact they have on individuals with I/DD and their families, and the critical need to increase their wages in the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget.

To enforce this message, The Arc of New Jersey, members of the Coalition for a DSP Living Wage, and the NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network came out in force for DHS Commissioner Carole Johnson's testimony before the Senate and Assembly Budget Committees on both April 29 and May 2. Commissioner Johnson, who oversees the Department of Human Services, spoke about the Department's funding priorities for FY 2020, including the issue of DSP wages.