

Although legislative meetings in June were held virtually, The Arc of New Jersey continued to advocate with lawmakers on pending legislation that will impact people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families and Chapters of The Arc. Last month, our organization provided oral testimony, via Zoom, before the Senate and Assembly Transportation Committees, the Assembly Human Services Committee and the Senate Budget Committee.

Executive Director Tom Baffuto was among the invited guests who provided an update to members of the Assembly Human Services Committee about the impact of COVID-19 on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc of New Jersey's testimony highlighted the need for Personal Protective Equipment and the dedication of our Direct Support Professional (DSPs) workforce who have, in addition to their normal responsibilities, kept spirits up, kept individuals engaged and kept people in touch with loved ones so that social distancing didn't have to mean isolation. We also provided recommendations for how best to move forward. This includes continuation of the day program retainer payments and the enhanced residential rate until providers are fully operational again, and continuation of the temporary \$3 wage increase for DSPs. The Arc of New Jersey also conveyed those same recommendations to the Senate Budget Committee as they voted on legislation to expand the current fiscal year by three months in light of COVID-19.

The Arc of New Jersey also supported a number of bills during the month of June. This included:

- **S2517** which aims to provide more efficient transportation services for individuals with I/DD by establishing a best practices pilot training program for paratransit providers. The bill is based on a successful transportation model spearheaded by The Arc Mercer.
- **S1563** which makes users of Access Link automatically eligible for and enrolled in the motor bus and rail passenger discounted fare program
- **S277** which requires school buses that transport students with special needs to be equipped with certain safety features.
- **A3827** which creates the New Jersey Council on Access and Mobility. The Arc of New Jersey is a named member of the Council and would represent those with I/DD should the bill be signed into law.
- **A4138** which would require the Department of Human Services to develop a public emergency response plan for licensed providers. The bill was amended to require provider input in the development of the plan and to ensure relevant guidance from the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and any other relevant federal agencies is included.
- **A4239** which as amended would require DDD to develop guidance on in-person visitation. The amendments also made legislation applicable to all public emergencies, not just COVID-19.