

## A woefully underfunded service

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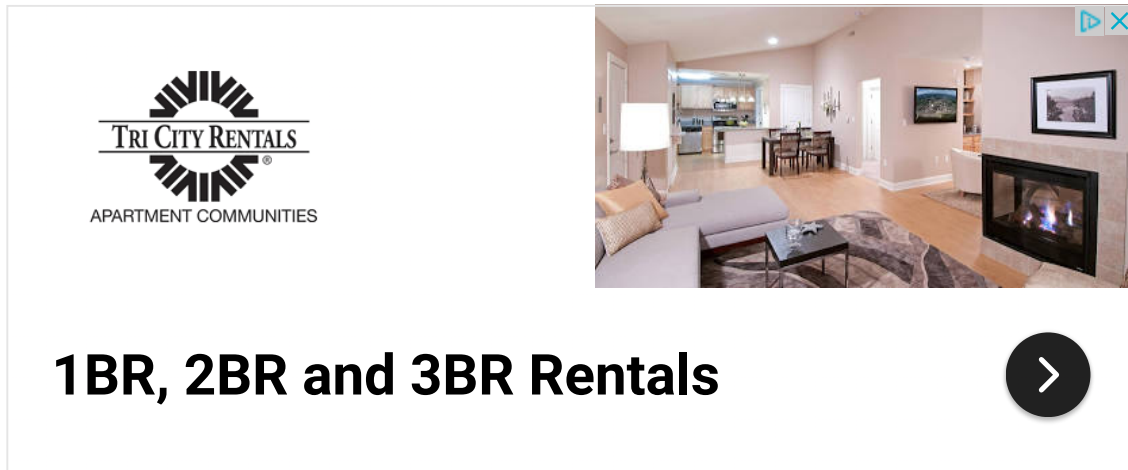
Kenneth R. Stall and Dorothy Wheeler

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In her Feb. 1 budget address, Governor Hochul asked if her administration has “met the moment” of making the New York dream a reality for all New Yorkers.

Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding NO for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), their families, and the skilled and dedicated staff who support them around the clock, every day.

As Coarc's Chief Executive Officer and Board of Directors President, we see the reality of a service system that is woefully underfunded every day. The impact of this lack of adequate funding is evident in the escalating staffing crisis and erosion of services for New Yorkers with I/DD.



**1BR, 2BR and 3BR Rentals**

In the past decade, inflation rose 27 percent, yet providers of services for New Yorkers with I/DD received less than a seven percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to balance the rising costs of operating programs. This is unsustainable.

Across New York, 100,000 dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) deliver essential supports and services to people with I/DD around the clock, every day. Historically, DSPs were compensated for their skilled work at well above minimum wage, but while wages advanced around them, DSP pay stagnated.

Today, the average DSP starting wage is just over \$16 an hour. These complex and critical roles have become minimum wage jobs. Service providers can't compete with starting wages in retail, fast food, and other industries. This is unacceptable.

Advocates for New Yorkers with disabilities are calling for the 2023-24 budget to include an 8.5 percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and a Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE) which would increase annual DSP wages by \$4,000, or approximately \$2.19 per hour.

Yet the governor's proposed budget includes only a 2.5 percent COLA, a full six percent less than the actual increase in inflation. There is no funding to support direct care worker wage increases or support for special education schools. This is indefensible.

One in three DSPs are leaving the field every year, from a role where continuity of care is essential. Turnover costs for nonprofit providers in New York have risen to more than \$100 million annually – \$100 million that would be better invested in keeping staff rather than losing them.



## 1BR, 2BR and 3BR Rentals



Nonprofit providers like Coarc are unable to sustain current programs or meet growing need due to staffing shortages. More New Yorkers need our support, but we don't have the staff to support them and an already long waitlist for care is growing.

Without investment, this workforce emergency will continue to force service reductions, program closures, and loss of supports for people with I/DD throughout the state.

History has shown us the tragedy that results from neglect of our most vulnerable citizens. We have overcome the horror of institutionalization and built a system of community integration and opportunity. But we can no longer sustain this underfunded system. We cannot revert to neglect of New Yorkers with disabilities. The state must include an 8.5 percent COLA and a Direct Support Wage Enhancement in the 2023-24 budget.

*Kenneth R. Stall is Chief Executive Officer of Coarc. He has worked at Coarc for 39 years. Dorothy Wheeler is President of Coarc's Board of Directors. She has volunteered on the board for 14 years.*

*Coarc is the Columbia County Chapter of The Arc New York. Our mission is to expand abilities, one person at a time, so people experiencing disabilities can achieve their individual goals. Our vision is to be an ethical organization that is a part of a society that recognizes people with different degrees of abilities as full contributing members of their community.*