

NEW YORK
**DISABILITY
ADVOCATES**

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On behalf of the not-for-profit providers agencies who deliver the essential supports and services to the more than 130,000 New Yorkers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and their families, we have been called upon to help relieve the pressure on the hospital system.

We have been asked by the State to accept individuals back into our residential programs who are currently inpatients that have tested COVID-19 positive and are being discharged. Additionally, our residential providers are also being asked to take individuals back from the emergency room who are either COVID-19 positive or presumed positive, again in order to alleviate pressure on the inpatient system.

For our provider agencies to do our part – we are currently establishing “special step-down” units in our day habilitation programs and at other sites to provide emergency housing for these individuals until their condition resolves and they are able to return to their residential program, or in the event that they become more acutely ill and require inpatient hospitalization.

This new emergency housing program will provide relief on the hospitals statewide and will protect our residential system, which currently provides housing for more than 35,000 individuals with I/DD from being overrun with COVID-19 cases and to protect the thousands of staff who are the backbone of our service delivery system from becoming infected.

We need to ensure that our residential system, that is the “back up” for the hospital system in this crisis, is not overwhelmed by the need to provide the equivalent of inpatient care in a single-family residence or residential apartment.

We were advised that OPWDD intends to provide two-levels of funding for the aforementioned emergency housing program – one for residents who have tested positive and are being discharged from the hospital and a second lower level of funding for individuals who have tested positive or are presumed positive (because no testing is available) in the Emergency Department and are sent home. This emergency housing program is also needed for individuals who are directed to quarantine or be placed in isolation by their treating physician because they are COVID-19 positive or presumed positive based upon symptoms and exposure. Furthermore, this enhanced rate is also needed to facilitate the movement of individuals who have not tested positive and are not exhibiting symptoms to other residential sites to prevent the spread of the infection.

We see no clinical or rational justification for providing a different level of funding for the emergency housing program, which will divert these individuals from hospitals and preserve hospital beds capacity for those with acute COVID-19 symptoms.

We are ready to provide a safety net to the hospital system with emergency beds, but we are desperately in need of the same level of enhanced funding for all such individuals, not just for those who are being discharged from the hospital while they remain COVID-19 positive.

Finally, we need the flexibility and authorization to move residents into these emergency placements located in now closed day habilitation sites, as swiftly and without prior authorizations or review by the

agencies, which are taking far too long. We need to protect our residential system and the thousands of direct care workers, who like other healthcare workers, are leaving their homes and coming to work each day knowing that there is substantial risk of becoming infected on the job or on the way to work.

Sincerely,

New York Disability Advocates