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July 1, 2021

Alison Barkoff, Acting Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging  
Administration for Community Living  
330 C St SW  
Washington, DC 20201

**Re: Caregiver (“Direct Support Professional”) Crisis in New York**

Dear Ms. Barkoff:

The mission of ACL and The Arc New York are very much aligned, which is that maximizing the independence and well-being of individuals with disabilities as well as their caregivers is the primary focus of both of our organizations.

The Arc New York is a family-led organization that advocates and provides supports and services to people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities, emphasizing person-centered choice and community engagement. With 37 operating Chapters across New York state, our organization is the largest voluntary provider in New York state, supporting more than 60,000 individuals and families and employing more than 30,000 people.

The Arc New York’s greatest resources in carrying out its mission is the Direct Support Professional (DSPs). New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) depend on caring, capable, and consistent DSPs for the support they need to live rich lives in their community. But our system is experiencing the greatest challenge it has ever faced – a crisis in the recruitment and retention of DSPs. Retention of staff is at an all-time low, while the percentage and number of vacant DSP positions is threatening to force massive interruptions and closures of programs and services throughout the state. The pandemic of 2020 has exposed and magnified what has become an existential threat to our system of care.

Our organization recently participated in a survey<sup>1</sup> with over 100 providers in New York and the results were startling:

Average Vacancy Rate for DSPs	-
24.75%	
Average Turnover Rate for DSPs	-
11.90%	
Providers with Vacancy Rate Over 30%	-
23.72%	

<sup>1</sup> These results were from 1/1/21 – 4/30/21.

Providers Closing or Reducing Programs Due to Shortages	-	47.9%
Providers Reporting Decrease in Applicants	-	93.16%
Providers Using Senior Staff to Cover Shifts	-	69.2%

With essential no cost of living adjustments for the voluntary sector for the last 10 years, agencies like ours have gone from being able to compensate DSPs at a rate that was far above minimum wage to just at or barely above minimum wage in most cases. We are competing with fast food and big box stores for jobs that require immense skill and dedication. The pandemic put an incredible strain on our resources and caused many overworked DSPs to leave the field entirely, and as the survey indicates, recruitment has ground to a practical standstill.

Our field is in desperate need of both short- and longer-term solutions to address this ongoing crisis. As a primary need, raising DSP compensation to ensure that all DSPs receive a living wage based on the actual level of care and experience they provide is critical. Because funding for these positions comes almost entirely from Medicaid funding, we recognize that New York State, in partnership with the federal government, must take the lead in partnering with voluntary agencies like ours to devise real solutions to this crisis.

We are advocating strenuously at both the federal and state level, and feel particularly that the Better Care Better Jobs Act is absolutely vital to our ability to continue to support New Yorkers with I/DD. However, there are many other solutions at the federal level, including tax incentives, standard occupation code, and other career ladder initiatives that we feel would be helpful in comprehensively addressing this crisis. We are seeking your support and guidance on how to best approach this issue and seek a dialogue with ACL regarding options and potential solutions. For example, we would be very interested in exploring and learning about;

- other models in place across the country that have been effective for DSP recruitment and retention;
- National or even regional studies that look at the efficacy of models such as housing, immigrant workforce, regulatory reform, and other concepts
- Feedback regarding any expectations around the use of exploratory funding provided by the enhanced federal matching funds

Finally, The Arc New York's annual meeting is being held virtually from October 19-22 and we would like to extend an invitation to you to speak regarding the role of ACL relative to the issues raised above. I can be reached by telephone at 518-439-8311 or via e-mail at [geizere@thearcnyc.org](mailto:geizere@thearcnyc.org). I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,



Erik Geizer  
Chief Executive Officer