

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

S.8675 (Fahy)/A.10449 (Santabarbara)

An Act to amend the public authorities law, in relation to the
Careforce First-Time Homebuyers Act

The Arc New York **strongly supports** S.8675/A.10449, the Careforce First-Time Homebuyers Act, which would direct the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA) to establish a dedicated first-time homebuyer program for members of the care workforce.

The disability services sector in New York faces a workforce crisis of historic proportions. In 2023–24, the New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) coalition, which includes The Arc New York, conducted a first-of-its-kind statewide study in partnership with Miami University of Ohio examining Direct Support Professionals' (DSPs) quality of life and the barriers affecting workforce stability. One of the most striking findings: nearly half of all DSPs experience housing insecurity. DSPs, certified nursing assistants, behavioral health workers, and related care staff are the backbone of community-based services for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, and other complex needs. Yet these essential workers are chronically underpaid and increasingly unable to afford stable housing—particularly in the communities where they work and where their services are most needed. **NYDA's own statewide survey data underscores the severity of this crisis: the staff vacancy rate stands at 13.9%, annual turnover is 32.2%, and average starting wages are just \$18.80 per hour.** At that wage level, homeownership is effectively out of reach in most New York housing markets without targeted assistance.

This housing instability is not merely a quality-of-life issue for individual workers; it is a

systemic driver of the recruitment and retention failures that leave group homes understaffed, day programs at reduced capacity, and individuals with disabilities on growing waitlists for services. When direct care workers cannot afford to live near the people they serve, turnover accelerates, continuity of care suffers, and the State's investment in community integration is undermined.

S.8675/A.10449 represents a targeted, structurally sound approach to a problem that has defied solution through wage increases alone. The Arc New York supports this legislation for the following reasons:

- **Directly addresses workforce retention.** Research consistently demonstrates that homeownership near one's place of employment improves job retention and reduces turnover. With statewide turnover at 32.2% according to NYDA survey data, even modest improvements in retention would translate into meaningful gains in continuity of care, reduced recruitment costs for provider agencies, and more stable services for the individuals who depend on this workforce.
- **Targets the right workforce with an appropriately inclusive definition.** S.8675/A.10449 defines "qualifying care workforce occupation" as healthcare workers determined by the Commissioner of Housing and Community Renewal **in consultation with the commissioners of the Department of Health, OPWDD, OMH, OASAS, and OCFS**—the very agencies whose service systems depend on this workforce. The statute specifies that eligible occupations "shall include but not be limited to direct support professionals, certified nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, behavioral health or human services staff, and early intervention and special education therapists." This consultative, multi-agency determination process and non-exhaustive statutory floor ensures that the program reaches the full breadth of the care workforce while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to evolving workforce needs.
- **Provides meaningful, layerable assistance.** The combination of a 50-basis-point interest rate reduction and up to \$20,000 in forgivable down payment assistance represents a substantive benefit that can be layered with employer-assisted housing benefits, local programs, and federal homeownership vouchers—maximizing impact for workers with limited savings.

CONNECTION TO BROADER WORKFORCE AND DISABILITY POLICY

New York has made significant investments in recent years to stabilize the direct care workforce through Medicaid rate adjustments, wage floors, and recruitment initiatives.

S.8675/A.10449 is a logical complement to those efforts. Wage increases alone have proven insufficient to overcome the compounding effects of housing costs—with statewide starting wages averaging just \$18.80 per hour, even full-time care workers face an enormous gap between earnings and the cost of homeownership, particularly in downstate and suburban markets where service demand is high and housing affordability is most strained.

Moreover, New York’s ongoing commitment to community integration under Olmstead requires a workforce that is not only adequately compensated but stably housed within the communities they serve. Homeownership is one of the strongest predictors of geographic stability and community attachment. When care workers put down roots in the communities where individuals with disabilities live, everyone benefits—through deeper relationships, more consistent staffing, and a stronger fabric of community-based support.

The Arc New York urges the New York State Senate and Assembly to pass S.8675/A.10449 and the Governor to sign it into law. This legislation represents a smart, targeted investment in the workers who make community-based disability services possible. By helping care workers achieve stable homeownership, New York can reduce turnover, strengthen its care infrastructure, and advance its commitment to individuals with disabilities living full lives in their communities.

For more information, contact Philip Aydinian, Director of Governmental Affairs, philip.aydinian@thearcnyc.org

About The Arc New York

The Arc New York is a family-led organization that advocates and provides supports and services to people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities (IDD), emphasizing choice and community engagement. With 35 Chapters across New York state representing every county, our organization supports more than 60,000 people and families and employs more than 30,000 people statewide.