

NEW YORK DISABILITY ADVOCATES

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August 3rd, 2022

Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H
Commissioner
New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza,
Albany, NY 12237

Dear Dr. Bassett,

On behalf of New York Disability Advocates (“NYDA”), which is a coalition of seven statewide provider associations representing more than 300 non-profit organizations that provide vital services and support to more than 125,000 New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), we wish to express our acute concern about the recently released guidance regarding the Healthcare and Mental Hygiene Worker Bonuses, which treats frontline workers doing very similar jobs differently, simply based on the setting in which they work.

The stated purpose and intent of the Healthcare and Mental Hygiene Worker Bonuses is as follows:

“New York’s essential front line health care and mental hygiene workers have seen us through a once-in-a-century public health crisis and turned our state into a model for battling and beating COVID-19. To attract talented people into the profession at a time of such significant strain while also retaining those who have been working so tirelessly these past two years, *we must recognize the efforts of our health care and mental hygiene workforce and reward them financially for their service.*” [emphasis added]

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the I/DD sector has unfortunately had to continuously fight to receive recognition and priority status for our workers and for the individuals that we serve, while also grappling with significant workforce staffing vacancies and historic underfunding from prior administrations.

Studies conducted by Syracuse University showed that COVID-19 presented a greater risk to individuals with I/DD, especially for those who live in residential programs, which highlighted the extreme exposure to the virus, that our workforce was forced to deal with on a daily basis, similar to staff working in hospitals and nursing homes.

Yet, in guidance released just today, your office extended the bonus eligibility to patient-facing food service workers, janitorial/maintenance workers and medical secretaries/administrative support who are employed by hospitals and nursing homes and *not* to those same workers in other settings.

Without the vital work done on a daily basis by these essential workers in our sector, group homes, day habilitation programs and clinics could not operate and provide the fundamental services that so many people rely upon.

For the reasons outlined above, this is incredibly disappointing and what we can only assume is an oversight that will be addressed by the Department of Health quickly.

We respectfully request that the Department swiftly address this inequity and extend the same employee title eligibility to our employees with equivalent titles, serving individuals with I/DD. We look forward to working with the Department and would be happy to meet to discuss our concerns in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Tom McAlvanah

*President, NYDA
Executive Director*
**InterAgency Council
of Disabilities**

Seth Stein

*Executive Director &
General Counsel*
**Alliance of Long
Island Agencies**

Mike Alvaro

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