

NEW YORK DISABILITY ADVOCATES

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WORKFORCE CRISIS TOPLINE TALKING POINTS

- For more than a decade, New York State has not invested to sustain essential supports and services for New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).
- Without adequate funding, I/DD provider agencies are unable to offer competitive wages needed to recruit and retain the skilled direct support staff that provide those critical supports and services.
- As New York enters a new era of politics with Governor Hochul, I/DD providers and our community are hopeful and eager to work with the new Executive administration and legislators to ensure that our most vulnerable community members are given the support they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives.
- The I/DD community is facing a Direct Support Professional workforce crisis that has been growing for over a decade and will continue to do so if the State does not take immediate action to address the issue and implement long-term solutions.
- While we recognize the inclusion of several 2% increases for DSPs that have been included over the years, we also must acknowledge that these wage increases were ultimately unfunded mandates, due to the state reducing provider rates, neutralizing the funding added to support those wage increases.
- We have already done the work to identify solutions that New York State can implement to help nonprofit providers recruit and retain DSPs: invest in the workforce by providing the statutorily promised COLA and making permanent the eFMAP investments that will increase wages by 20%.
- We also must expand the 20% workforce investment to include all direct care staff.
- In order to put an end to the crisis facing our sector, New York must:
 - Raise the wage
 - Stop the cuts
 - Fund the Future

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SUPPORTING TALKING POINTS

WAGES AND FISCAL INCENTIVES

- For a decade, I/DD provider agencies have not received proper investment from New York State to sustain essential supports and services.
- This lack of investment from the State includes a decade without receiving the statutorily promised cost-of-living adjustment.
- The lack of an annual COLA and investments in workforce wages, combined with the fiscal impacts of COVID-19, have left agencies across the state to experience significant financial losses.
 - This directly impacts supports and services for people with I/DD
- As stated in the 2006-07 Executive Budget, which created the COLA Statute, “[t]he COLA is expected to improve recruitment and retention of workers employed by voluntary providers as well as provide for inflationary cost increases. Such providers have only received limited COLAs over the past 11 years — in fact a cumulative 7.5 percent increase contrasted to the comparable cumulative 29.4 percent trend factor afforded hospitals and nursing homes — which has created serious workforce and other operating pressures, regulatory compliance and quality of care issues, and concerns about addressing community expansion needs...”
- These same agencies have seen significant cost increases related to mandated fringe benefits, repairs and maintenance, utilities, food, supplies, transportation and insurance over the past 12 months—adding continued financial pressure on agencies at a time when their sector is already in crisis.
- These financial pressures have exasperated the workforce crisis for direct care workers currently facing our sector.
- However, there are solutions to end this crisis:

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- Building off the successful inclusion of the COLA in New York State's current budget, Governor Hochul and New York's legislators have an opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past and implement the full 5.4% COLA in the FY 2023 State budget, to begin to fund the future of the I/DD community.
 - The COLA would immediately improve recruitment and retention of workers employed by voluntary providers as well as provide for inflationary cost increases.
- Workforce funding:
 - Maintain and expand 20% wage enhancements for direct care workers
 - Expand to CFR Title Code 100 and 300 Series Frontline Workers
- Incentivize recruitment and retention of direct care workers with an appropriate and competitive pay scale.
- Given the essential, life preserving, and demanding work of Direct Support Professionals, competitive pay will need to be coupled with unique incentives such as a Personal Income Tax Credit for employees providing direct care to I/DD individuals and are employed by a not-for-profit provider agency.
- DSPs provide life preserving and affirming jobs, providing medication, physical and behavioral health services, teaching, transporting, and otherwise supporting people who depend on them 24/7. These are not minimum wage jobs and should not be treated as such.

ESTABLISHING THE DSP CAREER AND PATHWAY

- Currently, too many direct care workers lack access to any form of career pathway or advanced training opportunities, which limits their ability to build their competency and expertise, leading to a net loss in valued experienced DSPs.

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- Unfortunately, due to the underfunding provider agencies have experienced, they are unable to provide these opportunities. However, with State funded grant programs, agencies can build focused pathways for the advancement and enrichment of the DSP career.
- Education also plays a vital role in building a workforce, implementation of a statewide SUNY/CUNY Direct Support Professional Credit and Career Ladder program will provide valuable credentials and into a successful career in the human services field.

BY THE NUMBERS

- According to a recent survey conducted by New York Disability Advocates:
 - 93% of providers saw a decrease in job applicants this year
 - Statewide vacancy rates increased 75% since pre- pandemic levels
 - 25% of all DSP positions are currently vacant statewide
 - 48% of providers were forced to close or reduce programs due to lack of staff
 - 39% of providers did not reopen programs due to staff shortages
 - Senior & administrative staff at 69% of providers were pulled from leadership responsibilities to cover direct care shifts.
 - The average statewide starting average wage for a residential direct care worker is \$14.56, in comparison to the statewide fast food minimum wage of \$15.