



Chief Operating Officer Erik Geizer's Oral Testimony

Joint Legislative Hearing of Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees on
FY 2022-23 State Budget

Chairwomen Krueger and Weinstein, Senators Brouk and Mannion, Assemblyman Abinanti and Assemblywoman Gunther, and other members of the Senate and Assembly, thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Executive Budget and its impact on our field and the people we support.

I am Erik Geizer, Chief Executive Officer of The Arc New York.

The Arc New York is a family-led organization that advocates and delivers essential supports and services in our mission to "provide people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities the ordinary and extraordinary opportunities of life." As the state's largest voluntary I/DD provider, we support more than 60,000 individuals and employ more than 30,000 people at 36 operating chapters serving *every county* in New York state.

For years, we have come to you advocating for investment in our system of care. Inflation has risen nearly 25 percent in the past decade, yet the I/DD field received only a 1.2% cost-of-living adjustment, with little other meaningful investment. A systemic lack of funding has resulted in wage stagnation for direct care staff and the inability of providers to maintain their basic physical infrastructures. This decade-long lack of investment, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, has driven us to a crisis point that threatens the safety and wellbeing of the vulnerable New Yorkers we support, and the future viability of the essential programs and services they rely on.

We have sat at this very table and called for change year, after year, after year, while our system erodes underneath us. **Today, finally, I come to you with hope, not in desperation.**

The proposed Executive Budget includes the 5.4 percent statutory COLA, and investments in workforce bonuses, recruitment and retention initiatives, capital funding and special education. **It includes promise for people with I/DD.**

Finally, our need has been heard. Finally, our workforce and our services are being recognized as an integral part of the state's essential healthcare system. Finally, New Yorkers with I/DD are being recognized as worthy of the care and opportunities we strive to provide them.

On behalf of our organization and field, we ask that you support the Governor's proposed investments by including them in your one-house budgets, and we ask that you consider these investments nonnegotiable. Specifically:

- The 5.4 percent COLA must be included in the enacted budget.
- Workforce retention bonuses and recruitment initiatives must be included in the enacted budget.
- Capital funding and special education funding must be included in the enacted budget.

This will not mark and end to our crisis, but will shift our course toward a solution. Sustained investment will be needed to ensure we never reach this point again. Yet our basic call to you is this: Investment is desperately needed. Investment is finally proposed. Support that investment with unwavering commitment, and use your influence to put that commitment into action by funding these critical proposals in 2023 and beyond.

Thank you.