

I am Erik Geizer, CEO of The Arc New York, the largest provider of services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New York state.

You've been hearing all day that our system is in crisis. You've been hearing it **year after year after year.**

I'm here today to tell you what that crisis truly means for the people we support. What 20,000 direct support vacancies means to a **single person.** How 1 in 3 DSPs leaving the field every day devastates the people in their care.

The Arc New York operates Chapters across every county in New York state. They are living this crisis. These are just a few of their stories:

Julie and Tom have to take off work two days a week because there is no Community Hab worker available for their daughter Celia. Julie is a Speech Therapist, and every Tuesday her students are left without her support. The rest of the week, Celia's **teenage sister** has to stay home to get Celia off her bus and provide supervision.

Cole aged out of his school program in June 2020, and has been waiting ever since for an opportunity to continue his life. As a young adult, imagine being confined in your apartment, waiting for someone to help you explore your future. Now 22 years old, Cole is unsure that support will ever come.

One of our Chapters hasn't been able to transition a single young adult from school to community supports for **three years.** A stack of requests for support goes unanswered.

David currently lives with his parents, who are in their 90s and in failing health. Within the year, David will have to be placed in a residential home or try to live at home independently. He has been approved for Community Habilitation services to hone his skills around shopping and being more of an advocate for himself, but staffing shortages have prevented him from starting this program. If he cannot develop these skills within a year, he will be forced to enter a residential home. That loss of independence will be devastating to him

and cost the state tens of thousands more dollars each year than if David was supported in living on his own.

Time and again we have not had enough staff to cover a home when someone needs to go to the hospital for emergency care, so they go to the hospital alone. Scared. Confused.

Lauren refuses to bathe for days on end because she is uncomfortable with substitute staff providing this intimate support.

Jacob — who started his life in Willowbrook and struggles to trust people — will only eat with people he knows well. He relies on the total support of trained and familiar staff to feed him a puréed diet. Strangers were filling in. **He stopped eating.**

We are displacing individuals from their homes and communities into larger settings to consolidate staff. It is stressful and heartbreaking for everyone involved. But we have **no other options.**

This is how we revert to the shameful treatment of the past. We move people from a four-person home in their community to an eight-person home in an unfamiliar town. We lose more staff. That eight-person home becomes sixteen. There's no staff to take them out. Before you know it, we have lost **50 years of progress.**

### **Do you hear me?**

Families are terrified that the basic safety and care of their loved ones is no longer guaranteed. Parents are leaving their jobs because they have no options for care. People with disabilities are alone and confused in the hospital, trapped in their houses, losing their independence, afraid to eat, afraid to bathe, unable to be part of their community, unable to know and reach their potential.

This is not acceptable to me.

It is not acceptable to providers and staff across the state who are fighting to deliver quality care without the resources to do so.

It is not acceptable to the people we support who are feeling this system crumble out from under them.

Today I ask: Is it acceptable to you?

Not just as a legislator, but as a human being.

**Is. This. Acceptable. To YOU?**

It shouldn't be.

Yet through underfunding and inaction, New York continues to accept it.

YOU are the ones who have the power to change this. YOU can stand up and say **this is not okay**. YOU can include resources for this critical system in your budgets. YOU can provide parity for our staff. YOU can go to the table and say this issue is non-negotiable. **YOU can begin to restore dignity and care for New Yorkers with disabilities.**

So do that.

**Do it.**

Anything else is unacceptable.