

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **LEGISLATORS, PROVIDERS, AND PARENTS JOINED DISABILITY ADVOCATES AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR HUDSON VALLEY RALLY TO ADDRESS STAFFING CRISIS OF DIRECT SERVICE PROFESSIONALS**

#### **Speakers Discussed Solutions as Crisis Forces Service Reductions, Program Closures, and Further Harms 140,000+ New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities**

**Hudson Valley, NY**— On Tuesday, members of New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) and Hudson Valley Service Providers held a virtual rally to address the state’s workforce crisis of Direct Service Professionals (DSPs). DSPs provide critical life support and services to more than 140,000 New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), but due to inadequate funding provider agencies are not able to provide competitive wages to recruit or retain their workforce.

Joining the groups were, State Senator Sue Serino, State Senator Mike Martucci, State Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick and Assembly Member Tom Abinanti, Assembly Member Ken Zebrowski, Assembly Member Chris Burdick, alongside Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), self-advocates, and parents. Video of the event can be found on [NYDA’s Facebook page](#).

“We all understand that the human services system is in crisis. We’ve got to do something. Triage is no longer working,” said **Assemblyman Tom Abinanti, Chair, NYS Assembly People with Disabilities Committee**. “We have to have a living wage, we cannot rely on the regular minimum wage, these are not minimum wage jobs. We need to increase the pool of workers, we have to provide incentives and we have to change the way we look at this field”

“At the end of the day this is really simple, we need to pay people right to do these jobs. These jobs are difficult, and it is no surprise when you have a combination of jobs that are underpaid and carry tremendous responsibility that we end up in this workforce crisis,” said **NY State Senator Mike Martucci**. “This is not a partisan issue, this is a human issue. This is about doing what is right. It’s time that this legislature catches up”

“It is far past the time that the state ensures that New Yorkers of all abilities have the resources they need not only to stay safe and healthy but to truly thrive”, said **NY State Senator Sue Serino**. “These hard-working men and women deserve to feel like the state values the work that they do each and every day, these workers and those they serve cannot wait any longer”

“It’s about time the wage reflects the difficulty of this work. A one-off one-percent increase for DSPs is offensive, and it is not even close to what is needed or deserved”, said **Senator James Skoufis**. “I am hopeful that we will have a partner to make sure funding is in place for our DSP’s and I will continue to fight until we rectify this long-overdue situation.”

“The state needs to put its money where its mouth is. There’s something wrong here in the state of New York when these jobs are paid the lowest in society”, said **Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski**. “It leaves these agencies that are doing God’s work struggling to find appropriate staff. We’ve had some small victories, but when you have these one-off victories, you are never catching up to what should be done”

“This is not a partisan issue, this should be something we all agree on, that we don’t pay people what they are worth”, said **Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick**. “Thank you so much to everyone who does what they do to keep people safe.”

New York State has failed to invest in sustaining essential support and services for New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Without adequate funding, I/DD providers are unable to offer competitive wages to entice workers for this critical role and compete against the employment incentives of the food and retail sectors.

“For over a decade, New York State has not provided any funding to increase DSP pay rates, to offset the negative impacts our community has felt from the increased minimum wage mandate,” said **Tom McAlvanah, President of the New York Disability Advocates**. “Our DSP workers are people too; they need the same thing that we all need, a living wage and stability. Our current funding system calls them essential workers, but it fails to provide them with their essential needs.”

The results of a recent survey conducted by New York Disability Advocates found that nearly 74% of DSP provider agencies experienced a higher vacancy rate than before the pandemic. Nearly half of surveyed agencies reported that they had to close programs or reduce operations due to staffing shortages. Unfortunately, without adequate funding provider agencies cannot provide wages competitive with sectors such as food service and retail to entice new workers.



The DSP workforce emergency affects continuity and consistency in the lives of the people being served. DSP workforce instability also affects provider agencies, as they struggle to maintain an adequate workforce and living wage for the 97,000 DSPs and ensure positive outcomes for the I/DD individuals to whom they provide critical supports and services.

### **About New York Disability Advocates (NYDA)**

(NYDA) is a statewide coalition of more than 300 non-profit organizations providing vital services and support to more than 125,000 New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### **About Hudson Valley Service Providers (HVSP)**

Hudson Valley Service Providers is a coalition of 22 private non-profit organizations that provide services and support to over 4,500 people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities across the Hudson Valley Region.