

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
New York State
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I write to ask that, as part of your 2017-18 Executive Budget Proposal, you include \$45M to begin developing a living wage for direct support workers who provide services to people with disabilities.

The work associated with supporting people with disabilities is hardly minimum wage work. Direct support workers are highly skilled, must support people with any/all needs, and often must help manage challenging behaviors. Increasingly, people who provide direct supports are leaving this line of work as organizations that provide these services on behalf of NYS are no longer able to offer competitive compensation. These organizations would raise wages for direct support staff, however, 90% of their revenue comes from public dollars, more than 80% of which goes to worker compensation. Therefore, any increase in direct support staff wages means additional investments by NYS.

Due to lack of investments over a period of years, we now have a workforce crisis when it comes to direct support workers. Service provider organizations experienced a 20% increase in staff vacancy rates from 2014 to 2015, a rate that now stands at 10% on average, statewide. Likewise, service provider organizations experienced a 21% increase in direct support staff one-year turnover rates from 2014 to 2015, a rate that now stands at an astonishing and unsustainable 23% on average, statewide. Simply put, if NYS does not make major investments in the direct support workforce this year, we risk staffing shortages that will cause provider organizations to collapse, and individuals with disabilities and their families to go without the vital supports on which they depend.

In order to stem this crisis, I ask that you include \$45M in your 2017-18 Executive Budget Proposal, as the first year of a 6-year commitment, that will eventually create a living wage for direct support workers. A living wage, commensurate with the job requirements and responsibilities, is the least we must do if we expect NYS to remain a model of supports for people with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
New York State
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am writing to you to request that you provide an additional \$45 million in the next State Budget specifically to raise the salaries of Direct Support Professionals (DSP's) who support New Yorkers with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their families 24 hours each day, seven days per week.

Nonprofit organizations that oversee these services rely on Medicaid for over 90% of their operating budgets and spend 80% of that on staff wages. These nonprofits employ over 100,000 DSP's State-wide who earn on average between \$10 and \$13 per hour to provide life preserving support for one of our most vulnerable populations.

Due largely to these low wages for the sophisticated and responsible work they do, too many workers leave these emotionally and physically difficult positions for less stressful and demanding employment, often for higher wages. As minimum wage rises, all of these positions will become minimum wage jobs which will make the increasing vacancy and turnover rates even higher. The health and safety issues appearing now due to the shrinking availability of qualified staff, will become unmanageable as there are fewer and fewer workers to fill these essential positions.

Advocates are rightly asking for an addition to the budget for this purpose and I urge you to include funding to pay a fair wage to DSP's in your next budget.

Sincerely,