

My name is Peter Guidarelli and I work for the Warren, Washington and Albany Counties Chapter of NYSARC Inc. I am also a parent of a child who has suffered grand mal seizures for almost half of his 21 years. He has epilepsy.

I am here to talk to you today about minimum-wage increases that have been prioritized for the fast food industry and has been hailed by some as a life-saving action. Quite frankly, I don't know where to begin. I believe that every person who wishes to seek gainful employment should be respected and paid a **commensurate wage for the job that they perform**. Whether you are a fast food worker, a state legislator, an engineer or somebody who cares for a person with a disability (a direct support professional-DSP). Every one of these jobs has value- every one of these jobs has a different value.

As the wage board rendered a decision this past summer there were thousands of people who care for the lives of those who cannot adequately care for themselves, who listened in disbelief as some state legislators and the Governor praised this increase in wages for the fast food industry. What was incredulous though is that as we made inquiries to our state legislators and brought up the issue that people who care for the lives of other people should be the number one priority in a wage adjustment, we heard statements like "the state cannot afford to pay for that" or "we can't do that because Medicaid increases need the feds on board". We were also told this was nothing more than a ploy so that our field would get upset and fight for our workers, then the state would be forced to pass a minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour across the board. **What was the rationale and analysis for either determining what these wages should be or what sectors of industry and jobs should be prioritized or who deserves what for the job that they do?** That is what a responsible business would do – because paying everyone the same wage for many different jobs makes no sense- If New York is open for business we should be acting like a responsible business.

Furthermore another answer --or I should say excuse --that came back to us in regards to wage adjustments for our direct support professionals, was that we get paid by Medicaid and that's the state and federal government and taxpayer dollars while increases for fast food workers will be paid for by the business owners - they can afford it. Those so-called rich business owners are the same people who are our generous financial supporters of so many nonprofit organizations across this state. My family has operated over 7 private businesses in New York State for over 50 years and I know firsthand that when you don't have the extra money, charitable donations are one of the first expenses that are eliminated. After all, if you cannot pay your bills you will never make another charitable donation again.

Let me address the excuse that Medicaid funded programs with state and federal tax dollars could not be prioritized because the federal government would have to be on board with this. **Ladies and gentlemen it is our job to provide the services for people with disabilities-- it is your job to fund them, both state and federal and if that means you get in the car and drive down to Washington DC and work with our Congressional and Senate members to do so, you need to do it-- that is your job.**

So while I am telling you what your job is I would like to add this. I am sure every one of you has told the people who elect you that your primary job is to keep the people safe and secure and I agree- I think everyone would agree that **IS** the number one job of our Government.

But safety and security is a relative term and is different for everyone- to the general public in the post 9/11 world, that has come to mean safe from terrorism. It has always meant safety in our neighborhoods and much more.

However, I think we forget that safety and security is different for everyone.

Governor Cuomo in his State of the State address quoted Hubert Humphrey "...the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped".

Ensuring the safety and providing care for a person, who by no fault of their own was born with a disability and unable to adequately provide for themselves, embodies this statement – THAT is a role of our government! These individuals rely on **YOU** to keep them safe. That safety is a different safety than what I previously mentioned-their safety that you are sworn to protect, comes in the form of not allowing them to choke on their food, wander off alone or unknowingly do anything else that would put their own life in danger.

That is why Medicaid financially supports the workers who care for the lives of these individuals on a 24 hour/seven day a week basis.

As you have already heard, DSP vacancy rates are at dangerous levels. If somebody has the choice to flip a hamburger or work a cash register for \$15 an hour or for the same \$15- feed, change and clean another human being and have the responsibility to take care of their life --sadly many people will opt for the easier job.

When the announcement first came out that fast food workers should be paid \$15 an hour, the knee-jerk reaction from many people in our industry was to say "us too". This led to the discussion of a minimum wage increase across the board for everyone, regardless of the job they perform, regardless of the value of their job. Quite frankly this does not solve our problem of high vacancy rates. As displayed in the aforementioned example, our vacancy rates will still continue to rise as people chose the easier job.

I would like you to seriously think about this statement and the message it sent to our field this past summer. The wage of a fast food worker goes to \$15 an hour while a direct support professional earns \$10-\$11 an hour. Essentially the Governor's calculation means that a person with a disability served by our agency

is worth 3/5 that of the fast food customer. How can anyone NOT justify prioritizing wage adjustments for DSP workers before analyzing any other field- especially the fast food workers? One would think that before a minimum wage adjustment is made for any industry, that government would prioritize who should get a wage adjustment.

DSP's receive 100 hours of initial training, 25 hours annually of follow-up training and are taught a meaningful career. When did the fast food industry career path pass the healthcare worker career path?

Is it unreasonable to request that before any minimum wage adjustment is mandated or recommended in any field in the private or public sector, that this legislature and the governor prioritize properly assessing the value of the direct support professional and work with our New York State congressional delegation to provide the funding for these workers who care for other people's lives?

Thank You,

Peter Guidarelli