



ANGELO SANTABARBARA, PE
Assemblyman 111th District

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January 13th, 2025

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Subject: Addressing Persistent DSP Workforce Challenges in the 2025 Executive Budget

Dear Governor Hochul,

As Chair of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on People with Disabilities, I am writing to urge you to prioritize addressing the ongoing challenges facing the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce in your upcoming Executive Budget.

For years, workforce shortages, high turnover rates, and significant vacancies have destabilized the care system that individuals with disabilities and their families rely on. These challenges persist year after year, creating instability for families and disrupting access to essential services.

While past measures, such as cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), the Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE), and one-time federal rescue funds, have provided some relief, they have not resolved the underlying instability in the DSP workforce. DSP wages remain unacceptably close to the state's minimum wage, despite the demanding and critical nature of the work.

DSPs are responsible for managing complex medical needs, assisting with daily living activities, and ensuring the safety and dignity of individuals. However, their wages do not reflect the skill and dedication required for such critical roles. This gap between the value of the work and the compensation provided continues to drive high turnover rates, disrupt care, and discourage individuals from pursuing or remaining in these essential roles.

To address these persistent challenges, I respectfully request that your Executive Budget include the following targeted investments:

DSP Wage Enhancement Act

Raising DSP wages to \$20/hour, indexed to inflation, will ensure that DSPs are compensated appropriately for the critical work they do. This increase will reflect the demanding responsibilities of their roles, ensuring that wages remain competitive and helping to attract and retain skilled professionals.

By setting a clear benchmark wage tied to inflation, this initiative provides a long-term, sustainable solution to wage stagnation, preventing future instability and helping to address workforce turnover and shortages.

Credentialing and Education Pathways Initiative

Investing \$50 million over five years to establish credentialing programs and career pathways will elevate the DSP profession and provide workers with opportunities for advancement and professional recognition. This initiative will help incentivize DSPs to stay in the field, improving workforce retention and care quality.

While the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Microcredential Program currently focuses on expanding the DSP workforce through training and recruitment, it does not provide structured career advancement opportunities or credentialing programs that would professionalize the DSP role. This initiative builds on this effort by addressing the need for career pathways, ensuring that DSPs have clear opportunities for growth, which will help stabilize the workforce and enhance care quality across the state.

Service Provider Support Fund

Establishing a recurring \$30 million annually for service provider agencies will enable them to consistently invest in workforce development, training, and retention strategies. This dedicated funding stream will support agencies in maintaining high-quality care and proactively addressing workforce challenges.

Unlike the one-time federal rescue funds, this proposal ensures that agencies have predictable, recurring funding, allowing them to make long-term investments in their workforce. This will help stabilize care and reduce turnover.

These proposals are designed to address the systemic challenges facing the DSP workforce by ensuring competitive wages, professionalizing the field, and equipping agencies with the resources to sustain their workforce. They build upon and enhance the efforts your administration has made, creating a more stable and sustainable system for individuals with disabilities and their families.

As the father of a son with autism, I have seen firsthand the vital role DSPs play in supporting individuals with disabilities. Their work has been instrumental in helping my son Michael achieve milestones that once seemed out of reach. However, the instability caused by turnover and vacancies continues to disrupt care, creating uncertainty for families across New York.

By including these proposals in your Executive Budget, we can work together to stabilize and strengthen the DSP workforce, ensuring a brighter future for individuals with disabilities and their families.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. I look forward to collaborating with you to make these investments a reality and would be happy to discuss this further.

Sincerely,



Angelo Santabarbara
Assemblyman, 111th District
Chair, New York State Assembly Standing Committee on People with Disabilities