



Self-Advocacy Association of New York State 2021 Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing Testimony

February 5, 2021

For many of New York's citizens with developmental disabilities OPWDD services are essential to realizing successful life outcomes including essential needs such as quality personal care all the way through realizing hopes and dreams such as obtaining independent housing, employment and other meaningful roles within their communities.

For at least a decade, there has been a trend in which investment in the system has not kept up with needs. As a consequence, we now see a number of signs that our system of supports and services are at risk. Among this signs is and ongoing staffing crisis, and a lack of responsive services. We have many people waiting for new residential, and other opportunities, as well as people currently in services facing significant barriers to real choice when seeking new opportunities.

While we commend OPWDD for placing particular emphasis this year on assisting people to enter the least restrictive settings, as well as creating rate flexibility to better support people with significant support-needs we are concerned that the additional 2% that NYS invests annually simply isn't enough to provide a sustainable system of services and supports which embrace person-centered values and practices.

Our understanding is that the current increase in demand for services exceeds this 2% annual budget growth. Demand may be as high as an additional 10% annually. We ask that NYS recognize that this failure to invest proportionately to demand is weakening the service system.

It is clear that investment is not adequate when we consider that though the proposed OPWDD budget has a 2% increase, there are still a number of cuts to the service system. Those cuts include, but are not limited to, a 5% cut to local assistance which impacts funding within individualized supports and services, and self-direction. This is a continuation of 20% withholds from 2020 for state funded services which present a particular risk to the stability of Fiscal

Intermediaries. Fiscal Intermediaries are essential to supporting self-direction across NYS. These organizations must be stable, as any risk of failure for fiscal intermediaries creates a risk to self-direction as a whole. As self-direction and ISS support people to reside in least restrictive community-based settings, cuts in these areas presents create new obstacles to OPWDD's goal of transitioning people into least restrictive settings.

So, we ask you on this legislative body to ask yourselves and your fellow legislators, is NYS doing enough? We have already seen declines in the quality of services related to a lack a competitive and fair wage for direct support professionals. We continue to see people waiting, waiting to get services for the first time, or waiting for the next step in their life. Too often people are waiting too long and for some, sadly, they wait in vain never realizing that next step. Many never have the opportunity to contribute to their community as much as they are able. This not only harms them, but it weakens communities as a whole. Addressing this need is a pressing social equity issue that NYS must take seriously.

As John F. Kennedy said: "A rising tide lifts all boats". It is imperative that New York State's investment in supports and services is commensurate with growth in demand for those services. Our service system needs to be stable and have a solid foundation on which to innovate person-centered services which promote and support the greatest degree of independence obtainable for each person served. Doing so is the right thing to do, the ethical thing to do and it is good, not only for New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities, it is good for communities and it is good for New York State.

About SANYS

SANYS is an organization founded by people with Developmental Disabilities for people with Developmental Disabilities. We have been "Speaking Up for Ourselves and Others" for over 30 years.

The above statements represent views of the Board of Directors and Members of the SANYS. For more information, or to schedule a meeting or visit, please contact: Arnold Ackerley, Administrative Director at aackerley@sanys.org or 518-603-6706.