



Self-Advocacy Association of New York State 2022 Mental Hygiene Joint Budget Hearing Testimony

February 14, 2022

Many of New York's citizens with developmental disabilities rely on services through NYS offices, particularly OPWDD and DOH. These services are essential to meeting our most basic needs and realizing our potential and maximize our contributions to our community, our state, and our country.

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 these signs is an ongoing staffing crisis, a lack of responsive services, and underemployment among New Yorkers with developmental disabilities.

Considering this, we are happy to say that there is much in Governor Hochul Proposed budget to be happy about. It is clear to see that New Yorkers with Disabilities are once again a priority and we ask that you stand with our Governor on the many areas of her proposed budget that will help improve our lives.

Importantly, the Governor is taking our Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce crisis seriously and we ask that you approve the following proposed investments in the new budget:

- healthcare worker retention bonuses that would help incentivize DSP's to remain in their current positions;
- A much needed Cost of Living Adjustment;
- and Pathways to facilitate new skilled workers entering the DSP workforce such as the SUNY for all partnership, Direct Professional Career and Technical Education Program and the Connect Immigrant New Yorkers to Direct Support Professionals program

It is important to note that while these investments are essential, they are not enough. We still need further investment to bring those wages up to competitive rates.

Furthermore, just like the DSP staffing crisis that was created through low wages in OPWDD, there is an ongoing staffing crisis in the DOH Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program.

Many self-advocates who are living in their communities rely on either a combination of Community Habilitation Staff through OPWDD's Self-Direction programming and Personal Care Aids through DOH's CDPA program or may entirely rely on CDPA.

CDPA Personal Care Aid wages have been too low for too long. As a result, few potential employees want to work as Personal Care Aids. We struggle to hire these workers who should be there to meet our most basic care needs. Furthermore, unlike people in certified services, who have the safety net of provider organizations, or state employees, to ensure that staff are available day to day, many of us who rely on CDPA staff find ourselves many hours or even days without CDPA staff to meet our most basic care needs. Consequently, many of us are suffering needlessly and some of us have even fallen into hospitals and nursing homes when our most basic needs could not be met.

Sadly, for many of us, when we look at our future, we see fear. Fear of falling out of the life we have built and into services that would remove us from our communities or, worse of all, no services at all. This situation cannot stand any longer. It has taken too many years for NYS to respond to the DSP staffing crisis and we still have a long way to go there. We must not repeat history, we need investments to increase CDPA Personal Care Aid wages. This is essential to our needs. Like all other New Yorkers, we have a right to live in our communities, a right to have lives of dignity and maximal independence. People are really suffering, and it is your duty to act. Therefore, we ask that you add increases in CDPA PCA wages into the new budget.

We would like to end by saying that we commend the proposed creation of the Office of the Chief Disability Officer and associated investments to increase employment for New Yorkers with disabilities and ask that you approve those proposed investments which are long overdue.

However, once again this is not enough. New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities need an Ombud's Office to ensure that our rights are being honored and that our services are of the highest quality and ask that you recognize and fund this need in the new budget.

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.