



Testimony

presented for the

Mental Hygiene Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

on behalf of

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL

of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc.

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The Interagency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc. (IAC), was formed in 1977 as a not-for-profit membership organization. Comprised of voluntary service providers supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities in the greater metro-New York area, IAC currently represents over 160 member agencies and organizations helping more than 100,000 individuals and their families in New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, and other areas of the state. Support programs and services offered by IAC member agencies include early intervention, Pre-K for All, special education preschool and school-age programs, as well as residential services, job training and employment programs, day habilitation programs, home and community-based supports, recreation, clinical and health services, and an array of supports to families.

The IAC has a long history of working in partnership with the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities to improve the quality of services and programs for New Yorker's with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

Our nonprofit providers, regulated and funded by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), deliver lifelong comprehensive, individualized services to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in all areas of their lives. In addition to delivering physical and behavioral health services, we assist with transportation, housing, medication administration, cooking, feeding, personal care, community living, employment and all the supports and services needed by the people enrolled in our programs.

As members of New York Disability Advocates (NYDA), a statewide coalition of seven provider associations representing more than 300 not-for-profit providers that are responsible for providing vital services and supports to more than 130,000 New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), we offer the following comments on the Executive Budget Proposal for OPWDD.

INVESTING IN NEW YORK'S CARE ECONOMY

2.5% COLA for SFY 2024

Following more than a decade of provider agencies not receiving a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), the significant fiscal impacts of COVID-19 and inflation, agencies' costs have increased significantly. Sizable cost increases related to mandated fringe benefits, repairs and maintenance, utilities, food, supplies, transportation, insurance, and other increases over the past 10 years have resulted in significant financial pressure on agencies. Additionally, since they are solely funded by Medicaid, agencies are unable to increase reimbursement. This has also directly led to the inability to invest in workforce wages for direct care workers and other essential front-line staff, resulting in wage stagnation that led to a workforce crisis that has prevented people from receiving services across the state. The 5.4% COLA in last year's enacted budget was a critical first step in restoring our infrastructure including staffing. As evidenced by the CPI, on which the COLA is usually based, the cost of doing business has risen much more than 2.5% over last year and this year's proposed COLA falls far short in supporting our services and staff.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **Provide an 8.5% COLA , commensurate with increased costs, for Human Services Agencies**

Direct Support Wage Enhancements

In recognition of the staffing crisis, last year, deserving Direct Care Staff who work for State Operated Programs received a 13% salary increase, while nonprofit providers used the 5.4% increase to cover all increased costs, in addition to providing modest increases in direct care staff salaries. Even this small investment began to reduce vacancy and turnover rates slightly, showing that investments in our service delivery system work.

This year's budget, in recognition that ongoing investments in staff salaries are needed to ensure a stable workforce, includes a salary increase of \$4000 upstate and \$6000 downstate **for State Operated Direct Care Staff** (and more for staff working in secure treatment facilities).

Even with the modest increase we were able to provide last year for our DSPs, the statewide average starting pay for nonprofits is \$16.07. Compare this with the new State Operated DSP starting salary of \$23 per hour upstate and \$25 per hour downstate. Outside of the Developmental Centers, our nonprofit workforce provides the same supports to the same type of people with I/DD as the State Operated workforce.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **Correct this glaring inequity by providing a \$4000 Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE) for Direct Care Staff employed by nonprofits who do the same work, providing the same support to the same kind of people as State Operated Workers do, as a first step in increasing salaries for the nonprofit workforce who are mostly women of color, working more than one job to make ends meet for their families.**