



TESTIMONY
2024-25 JOINT LEGISLATIVE
BUDGET HEARING
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGEINE
JANUARY 23, 2024

Written testimony submitted by [Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance](#) at [Adirondack Foundation](#)

INTRODUCTION

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony to the 2024-25 Joint Budget Hearing on Health and Mental Hygiene.

Our written testimony is the collaborative work of our members reflecting the expertise and experience of early child care educators, family support providers, child care providers, regional child care resource and referral agencies, early intervention providers and agencies, businesses, municipalities and families. Founded in 2015, the Alliance connects a network of public and private sources that provide early childhood education, physical health, social-emotional development, and family support services, making it easier for providers and parents to find needed resources. We provide a needed forum for organizations and individuals committed to this work to share best practices, identify funding opportunities, and discuss and work together to solve common challenges. At the same time, our relationships across the region help us identify gaps, bridge services, and leverage community resources to improve early childhood services in our region.

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation appreciates the opportunity to share with you our perspective on the 2024-25 Executive budget and recommendations for improving services for children and families in the Adirondacks.

EARLY INTERVENTION

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance appreciates the Executive budget proposal to increase reimbursement rates by 5%. In addition, we appreciate the recognition that rural areas face challenges in meeting the needs of our children due in part to the lack of early intervention providers in the region. The proposal to provide a 4% rate modified for those working in rural and underserved areas is appreciated.

While we appreciate the proposal, our providers would prefer an across the board increase of 11% to all providers. We are concerned that even with the modifier, the rate increased proposed will simply not provide enough incentive for providers to remain in the region and provide services within the Early Intervention program. In addition, we are concerned that creating administrative complexities within an already complex system will slow down reimbursements and further stress our providers financially.

We believe that a multifaceted approach to incentivizing providers to remain in the region and participate in the program is needed. First, a robust and universal rate increase if 11% is

essential to simply stabilize the system. Second, investments in loan forgiveness or scholarships for those who service rural or underserved areas would help retain professionals. Finally, we encourage the State to develop a new funding structure that supports the true cost of delivering services in rural areas, taking into consideration geography, broadband limitations and travel expenses and time.

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance appreciates the Executive Budget’s proposal and hopes the Legislature advances changes that will improve its impact on rural regions.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST LICENSURE

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance appreciates the proposal to extend the authorization of school psychologists to work in certain preschool programs for an additional two years.

Unfortunately, because school psychologists are not fully licensed, they continue to be excluded from other programs, such as early intervention, where they are greatly needed. We therefore encourage the Legislature to pass legislation to license school psychologists (S3036/A2033).

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY ASSISTANTS

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance supports the establishment of speech language pathology assistants. The need for speech language pathology services is increasing among all populations. Whether it is young children needing assistance acquiring language, stroke patients relearning skills, or elderly individuals seeking accommodations to support their health and well-being, speech language pathologists are in high demand.

Unfortunately, there are far too few speech language pathologists to meet this demand, especially in the North Country. According to NYS Office of the Professions statistics, here are the number of licensed therapists, by county:

Clinton	Essex	Franklin	Hamilton	Warren
103	23	33	4	63

The services of a speech language pathologist range from serving mild language acquisition delays to resolving complex needs of stroke patients. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association has long recognized that an assistant position within the profession would allow speech language pathologists to work at the top of the scope while under their supervision, allow educated and trained individuals to provide quality care and services. The thoughtful

establishment of a speech language pathology assistant within the profession will improve access while ensuring quality of care.

The Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance encourages the Legislature to consider the creation of speech language pathology assistants.

CLOSING

Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance appreciates the opportunity to share with you our communities' recommendations for improving services to children and families in the Adirondacks. We look forward to working with you during this legislative session.

For more information, please contact Kate Ryan, Director at Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation at kate.ryan@adkfoundation.org.