

Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2024 Executive Budget - Higher Education

Dear Honorable members of the New York State Senate and Assembly

RCAL is one of over 40 Independent Living Centers (ILCs) located in New York State, responsible for serving individuals of all ages and disabilities, to help maximize their independence. The overarching mission and goal of ILC's is to provide and advocate for home and community-based services (HCBS) in order to decrease the likelihood of individuals will be institutionalized, and to maximize their freedom within the community in the most integrated setting possible in accordance with the Supreme Court's *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision. Particularly since the onset of the COVID pandemic and the ensuing tragedies in nursing homes, individuals are seeking to live at home in increasing numbers.

Unfortunately, this year's Executive Budget proposes level funding once again for the ILC network. This uphill funding battle is exacerbated by the proposal to provide a 1.5% cost of living increase to human service agencies which does not include Independent Living Centers due to our location in the State Education budget. We continue to urge the state to increase the total funding line to \$18 million and to ensure a statutory cost-of-living adjustment to ensure funding keeps pace with the ever-rising cost of doing business. This addition of just \$2 million would be divided among the 41 centers statewide.

New York's Independent Living Centers are asking for the Legislature's support of an additional \$2 million to bring the total funding up to \$18 million. An \$18 million total allocation is long overdue and essential to sustaining independent living services statewide, while also delivering \$45 million in projected annual savings based on current data from the New York State Education Department, ACCES-VR, showing that the work of ILCs to transition and divert people with disabilities from costly institutional placements save the State more than \$9 in institutionalization costs for every state dollar invested in ILCs.

Finally, the governor's budget proposals over the last two years have made it increasingly difficult for individuals to qualify for greatly needed community such as personal care, physical and occupational therapy and others. It is based on the false assumption that increased spending on these vital services will inevitably lead to an uncontrollable increase in spending year-over-year that the state cannot afford. In fact, it has been shown that a significant investment into personal-care wages and home and community-based services would provide great financial dividends to the state and lift countless numbers of family members currently caring for loved ones and unable to work, out of poverty (Isaac Jabola-Carolus, 2021). (see <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58fa6c032e69cfe88ec0e99f/t/6022ae8312cfd1015354dbee/1612885635936/Executive+Summary+CUNY+REPORT.pdf>)

Sincerely,

Keith Gurgui
Systems Advocate
Resource Center for Accessible Living
727 Ulster Ave. Kingston NY 12401

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