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We appreciate this opportunity to submit this Testimony on the Governor's 2024-25 Budget. NYC FAIR is an Advocacy and Resource group of families and concerned individuals advocating on behalf of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) across the entire spectrum of need within the five boroughs.

The Governor's budget refers to the investments she has previously made since she has taken office. Yet this budget fails to keep up with the reality of needs in the IDD system. This system was starved for a decade while needs increased and costs continued to rise. Against this backdrop, the Executive Budget proposes a "cost of living" increase for service providers which fails to cover even half of the costs caused by inflation, much less address the gaps left by past disinvestment. The budget fails to provide wage increases for the Direct Care workers. It is the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and those who work with them who support individuals in their homes, in the community, on their jobsites, and with activities of daily living. Without DSPs, services cannot be provided. In many instances, adequate services are simply not available to meet the needs of those who rely on them. The spending proposed in this Budget fails to address these **extremely** serious problems.

DSPs continue to be underpaid. They comprise a "majority-minority workforce with 74% identifying as women and 62.7% identifying as Black, African American, Asian or Latino"*. As of January, of this year, salaries for DSPs were slightly above minimum wage with those working downstate making on average \$17.16 an hour and those upstate making \$16.48 an hour. This underfunding has resulted in a crippling 30% annual turnover rate, with staff vacancies in excess of 17%. In fact, more than 20,000 Direct support positions across the State are unfulfilled. State required goals for a person-centered delivery system and inclusion rather than exclusion from community activities are not being fully met. There are simply not enough workers to Staff Day programs, to help individuals participate in activities, or to assist them with employment. Agencies have

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had to close residences; shrink existing services and they have been unable to expand services to meet growing needs. This leaves many individuals with little or nothing to do.

What is Required

We strongly urge the State to consider a permanent solution by adopting a plan to invest in the salaries of DSPs to bring them substantially above minimum wage . However, in order to help stave off even further deepening of the crisis, we strongly urge the Legislature to include in this budget: **1) A cost of living increase of 3.2% to cover the increased costs for the voluntary agencies providing services and for those in self direction. 2) A Direct Support Wage Enhancement of \$4,000 per eligible employee to permanently increase the hourly pay for Direct Care workers.**

It is important to note that State operated services, which serve 15% of the IDD population, pay salaries that greatly exceed those earned by the rest of the field. DSPs who work for non-profit providers make 30% less than their peers at State programs. In fact, over the last two years the State has paid their workers wage enhancements without offering the same to workers in the non-profit sectors who perform the same jobs for the same vulnerable population. It is obvious that the value of this work is realized by the Executive and yet the Executive has failed to act to close this wage equity gap.

Economic Benefits

The Budget proposals for the disability workforce fail to recognize the economic benefits to investing in this field. These benefits represent a return on the State's investment in this sector. New York's disabilities workforce is an essential economic driver that contributes more than \$2.2 billion in State and Federal tax revenue. New York's disabilities field generates an economic impact of \$14.3 billion, which includes provider, supplier, and employee spending, bolstering local economies across the State**.

A \$4000 wage Enhancement is an investment in human infrastructure which will make good on the State's policies to bolster Employment. In a

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sector which is predominately composed of women and minorities, it will positively impact these communities.

Long term investment in the disabilities workforce will only increase these economic benefits and bolster this workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this Testimony.

*The People's Budget, New York Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus (Budget Equity XXXII)

**Information compiled by the Rockefeller Institute in 2019.

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