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## **Testimony for the Joint Legislative Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget Proposal: Labor and Workforce Development**

February 25, 2026

My name is Molly Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer. This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MSEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director of CIDNY.

As an Independent Living Center, CIDNY has provided critical services to people with disabilities in NYC since its founding in 1978. By providing services that address the social determinants of physical health, mental health, education, employment, housing, and transportation, as well as providing support for the development of independent living skills, CIDNY helps people with disabilities navigate the ever-changing service system, and enables them to live independent, fully integrated lives in the community. Obtaining and maintaining gainful employment is a critical component of this endeavor, and ensuring positive outcomes for employees with disabilities in NYS is a cornerstone of CIDNY's mission.

In 2024, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 37.4% of disabled people between the ages of 16 and 64 were employed in the United States. According to the same report, employees with a disability were almost twice as likely to work only part time as people without a disability (31% vs 17%), and less likely to work in traditionally higher paid managerial or professional positions than people without disabilities (37.9% compared to 44.1% respectively). The American Community Survey reported that even when people with disabilities did work fulltime, their median salary was more than \$9,000 lower than the median salary of people without disabilities (\$48,937 vs \$58,113); and among working-age people between the ages of 16 and 64, poverty was more than twice as prevalent in the disabled community as in the non-disabled community (24.2% vs 9.9%). People with disabilities seeking gainful employment face gaps in hiring, advancement, and wage parity.

Over the course of the last few years, significant efforts have been made in NYS to address these gaps, and to increase the hiring and workplace retention rates of people with disabilities. This includes the 2024 signing of Executive Order 40, which established New York as an Employment First state.

We are pleased that Governor Hochul included several key investments for improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the FY 2027 Executive Budget. **CIDNY strongly supports the investment of \$5 million for creating a new Assistive Technology Innovation Center, as well as the \$60,000 investment to launch an Adaptive Clothing Grant Program.** Both will not only create economic opportunities, but will create products that will ultimately help remove often overlooked barriers many people with disabilities face as members of the workforce. **CIDNY also calls on Governor Hochul and the NYS Legislature to include**

**the following recommendations in the final budget**, which will help ensure that there are more opportunities for people with disabilities to be recruited, hired, retained, and promoted:

- **Increased State funding for nonprofit human services workers**

Human services nonprofits are primarily funded through government contracts, and though program costs have risen with inflation, the amount of funding in State contracts has not. Core human services workers (those working in individual and family services) earned, on average, an annual salary of \$36,688 in 2023, making this sector one of the lowest paid industries in New York (in New York City it is the third lowest-paying industry in the city). This is despite the workforce being comprised of predominantly of highly skilled and educated workers (61% hold a bachelor's degree or higher), and that the workforce provides crucial supports and services to vulnerable New Yorkers.

To ensure that human services nonprofits are adequately funded, and their workers paid fairly, the State should:

- **Fund a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) on all State human services contracts.** This investment will help nonprofits cover inflation-related increases in wages and program operations, in line with the current 2.7% Consumer Price Index (CPI).
  - **Create a Blue-Ribbon Commission on the human services workforce** to go beyond the TII and identify ways to increase human services wages for long-term reform.
- **An appropriation of \$5 million for a reasonable accommodation grant program**, under which eligible employers could request a grant for reimbursement of expenses made for reasonable accommodations for applicants or employees with a disability.

This funding, as supported in bill **A9151 (Bronson)**, would address a significant contributing factor to the underemployment of people with disabilities: the stigma surrounding asking for accommodations, and the (unfortunately, sometimes justified) belief that employers will deem their accommodation requests too expensive and "unreasonable," and therefore deny them. This funding would help ensure not only that critical accommodations are provided to employees who are entitled to them, but that those employees feel encouraged to make those requests in the first place.

- **An increased investment in Employment First (E1stNY)**, to continue the hiring and promotion of people with disabilities across NYS, particularly within State agencies.

Thank you for your time and continued effort to ensure that people with disabilities have equitable access to gainful employment in NYS.

Sincerely,

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