

In her budget address, Governor Hochul asked if her administration has “met the moment” of making the New York dream a reality for all New Yorkers.

Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding NO for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), their families, and the skilled and dedicated staff who support them around the clock, every day.

As [your role – Executive Director, staff, family member, etc], I live the reality of a service system that is woefully underfunded every day. The impact of an escalating staffing crisis. The erosion of services for New Yorkers with I/DD.

[If a family member, you can share your personal experience, what services mean to you, how you and your loved one are impacted by underfunding].

In the past decade, inflation rose 27%, yet providers of services for New Yorkers with I/DD received less than a 7% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), to balance the rising costs of operating programs.

That is unsustainable.

Across New York, 100,000 dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) deliver essential supports and services to people with I/DD around the clock every day. Historically, DSPs were compensated for their skilled work at well above minimum wage, but while wages advanced around them, DSP pay stagnated. Today, the average DSP starting wage is just over \$16 an hour. These complex and critical roles have become minimum wage jobs. Service providers can't compete with starting wages in retail, fast food, and other industries.

That is unacceptable.

Advocates for New Yorkers with disabilities are calling for an 8.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and a Direct Support Wage Enhancement in the 2023-24 budget.

Yet, the governor's proposed budget includes only a 2.5% cost-of-living adjustment—a full 6% less than the actual increase in inflation. There is no funding to support direct care worker wage increases or support for special education schools.

That is indefensible.

One in three DSPs are leaving the field every year, from a role where continuity of care is essential. Turnover costs for nonprofit providers have risen to more than \$100 million annually – \$100 million that would be better invested in keeping staff than losing them.

Providers are unable to sustain current programs or meet growing need due to staffing shortages. More New Yorkers need our support, but we don't have the staff to support them. An already long waitlist for care is growing.

Without investment, this workforce emergency will continue to force service reductions, program closures, and loss of supports for people with I/DD throughout the state.

History has shown us the tragedy that results from neglect of our most vulnerable citizens. We overcame the horror of institutionalization. We built a system of community integration and opportunity.

We can no longer sustain this underfunded system. We cannot revert to neglect of New Yorkers with disabilities. The state must include 8.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and a Direct Support Wage Enhancement in the 2023-24 budget.

New York state provides supports and services for 130,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) across the state. 85% of these services are provided by nonprofit providers like [Affiliate name]. Just 15% are provided by state operated and run programs. All of these programs are funded by the state, but they are not being funded equitably.

As [your role], I am faced with the impact of our escalating staffing crisis every day. Let me be clear. Our system of support for New Yorkers with I/DD is eroding. Without staff we cannot meet the needs of individuals and families. Without staff we cannot guarantee the safety and wellbeing of the people we support.

In their five-year strategic plan released last year, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) acknowledged the critical need to solve the workforce crisis. They stated that their primary goal was to, “improve the recruitment, retention, and quality of the direct support workforce” by “investing in the workforce.”

They followed through with their commitment for Direct Support Professionals at state-operated facilities but did not include the nonprofit workforce.

New York State has provided two wage increases for their state-operated direct care workers in the past year, including a 13% increase in calendar year 2022, \$4,000-\$6,000 proposed increases in 2023, and an additional \$50M announced in 2024.

Today, our DSPs and other frontline staff are now making only 70% of what their state counterparts make – doing, the same job and supporting the same individuals in the same state-funded system. It is difficult enough to compete with for-profit national conglomerates, who offer better wages and less responsibility. Now we must compete with state run facilities within our own field, where people are earning \$23-\$25 per hour, compared to \$16 with our providers.

This is not equal pay for equal work. And it is not an equitable investment in the New Yorkers with disabilities supported in different branches of the same system. It destabilizes our entire field, and places the people we support at risk.

The state has articulated the need to address our staffing crisis and increase wages for Direct Support Professionals. The state has met this need for their own staff. They need to meet it for ours. If they do not, our programs will continue to be reduced or eliminated due to

lack of staffing, and many years of progress toward community integration, choice, and deinstitutionalization will be lost.