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Memorandum in Support

TO: New York State Senate and Assembly Members

Date: March 26, 2026

RE: **S.7792 - C (FAHY)/ No Same as**

Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State (CP State) was founded in 1946 by parents of children with cerebral palsy looking for services. Today it is a broad-based, multi-service organization with 30 Affiliates across the state and 19,000 employees providing support, services, and programs across the lifespan for over 100,000 individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. CP State was founded and has worked for the past eighty years to enhance the rights of and services for individuals with disabilities and their families

CP State strongly supports S.7792 - C (FAHY) which creates a new provision in Mental Hygiene Law to formalize a New York State Communication Bill of Rights for Individuals with Disabilities. Unlike the prior bill prints, which CP State opposed, S.7792-C guarantees the right to validated autonomous communication in a persons preferred modality and the use of validated communication supports tailored to individual needs. The term validated communication is defined as an evidence-based, empirically supported approach that has demonstrated effectiveness in enabling autonomous communication by the user. **Because the S.7792-C applies only to validated communication methods and supports, CP State strongly supports S. 7792 - C (FAHY) and urges that it be enacted into law.**

CP State Affiliates, across New York State, have traditionally provided supports and services for individuals with complex needs, including communication needs. Our Affiliates have been on the cutting edge of and encourage the use of evidence-based methods that enhance communicative abilities of people with developmental disabilities. We believe in promoting evidence-based practices that prioritize clear, direct methods of communication, empowering individuals with disabilities to express their authentic voice independently. Our shared goal is to provide strategies that foster genuine expression and independent communication while adhering to the highest standards of clinical integrity and ethical responsibility.

For the past eighty years, CP State has strongly advocated for the rights of all people with developmental disabilities to have their own voice, thoughts, and opinions to be heard and respected. Communication that reflects the thoughts, will, and opinions of the person is essential to ensure maximal individual autonomy and decision-making. This includes individuals who are non or minimally verbal who may be able to communicate via different methods or with the use of technology. However, communication methods vary, and it is critical to understand which methods have empirical support.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is a well-established, evidence-based approach that helps individuals with significant speech or language limitations communicate independently. AAC systems are individualized and may include low-tech options (such as sign language or picture exchange) or high-tech tools (such as speech-generating devices). The AAC approach is a clinically driven intervention that presumes competence, emphasizes independent communication, and has substantial empirical support in peer reviewed studies. As used here, “empirical support” refers to AAC interventions that have adequate and controlled scientific research evidence that demonstrate effectiveness and validity of the approach in enhancing a person’s ability to communicate independently.

CP State opposed previous versions of this legislation because it included communication methods that lack credible scientific evidence. Approaches that rely on prompts, physical assistance, or facilitator involvement—rather than independent communication—have not been shown to be valid or reliable and cannot be included in a Communication Bill of Rights. All communication approaches should be grounded in rigorous scientific evidence. Supporting proven AAC methods is essential to ensuring that individuals with complex communication needs can express themselves accurately, independently, and with dignity.

Because the S.7792-C applies only to validated communication methods grounded in rigorous scientific evidence, CP State strongly supports S. 7792 - C (FAHY) and urges that it be enacted into law.