



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senate GOP budget will propose funding to compensate direct care professionals: O'Mara calls it 'absolute priority' for people with disabilities

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 13, 2017

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We cannot afford to risk the health and well-being of people with disabilities because New York State fails to invest in a stable, long-term workforce of trained and skilled direct care professionals.

Albany, N.Y., March 13—State Senator Tom O'Mara today joined his Senate Republican colleagues in calling for the final 2017-2018 New York State budget to include \$45 million to

compensate direct care professionals for the important work they do to support people with disabilities.

The state's budget adoption process is getting under way in earnest next week with both houses of the Legislature scheduled to adopt their respective versions of what should be included in the final, 2017-2018 state budget. Commonly known as "one-house" budget plans, following the adoption of the plans the Senate and Assembly will convene public, joint budget conference committees to begin ironing out differences before entering into final budget negotiations with the governor.

O'Mara said that the Senate's one-house budget, scheduled to be acted on this week, will include the direct care funding. He said the Senate is seeking to address a lack of funding in Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed 2017-18 state budget to help appropriately adjust salaries at not-for-profits that employ workers who provide state services for individuals with autism, serious brain injury, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other developmental disabilities.

"This is an absolute priority. We cannot afford to risk the health and well-being of people with disabilities because New York State fails to invest in a stable, long-term workforce of trained and skilled direct care professionals," said O'Mara, a member of the Senate Finance Committee.

Currently, many direct service professionals (DSPs) earn an average of \$10-\$13 per hour – just above the state's minimum wage. Last year, the state implemented minimum wage increases that did not provide funding to account for the "compression factor" - the need to increase the salaries for more experienced DSPs and supervisors in order to maintain the current salary gap with minimum wage workers. Without new funding provided to the DSP employers providing services on behalf of the state, the salary gap will compound the

existing high turnover rate among those providing these critical services, and lead to significantly increased vacancies as qualified individuals seek less strenuous minimum wage work.

The Senate's proposal provides \$11.25 million in funding to help implement wage increases in the current year's budget. Starting in 2017-18, \$45 million would be provided annually to further ensure fair wages for this sector and prevent negative impacts on developmentally disabled services.

A new state budget is scheduled to take effect on April 1, the start of New York's new fiscal year.