



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Carlucci & Disability Advocates Ask OPWDD to Reconsider Proposed Cuts

Senator David Carlucci

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(Albany, NY) - New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities are in jeopardy of losing critical care and services in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic on July 1, 2020. The State's proposed cuts amount to \$238 million, funding previously secured by Senator Carlucci for The Office of People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) in this year's budget.

This massive funding cut will adversely impact nonprofit providers of residential services, Care Coordination Organizations (CCOs), and others who have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic like Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who work every day to ensure the safety of individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. DSPs and other staff at OPWDD licensed providers have reported not having adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Sadly, providers were not given the OPWDD funding necessary for PPE and were without adequate support from the Office of Emergency Management who was tasked with distributing PPE.

Senator David Carlucci said, "Every day of this crisis, my office advocated for OPWDD providers to get the PPE they needed, and often we saw it was not happening. This resulted in OPWDD frontline workers being left exposed to a deadly virus. The lack of response at these critical levels was unacceptable and should have never happened. I stand with advocates in urging OPWDD to reconsider these devastating cuts and work toward solutions with our nonprofit providers who are doing life-saving work. We must fight for our Direct Support Professionals and our

State's most vulnerable. I have introduced legislation to speed up the delivery of State and federal funds to reimburse providers within 30 days for COVID-19 costs and expenses."

Tom McAlvanah, President of New York Disability Advocates said, "Hazard pay for the heroic efforts of direct service professionals combined with multimillion dollar purchases of personal protective equipment have left nonprofit organizations who provide services to people with developmental disabilities financially devastated. OPWDD's reckless budget cut in the aftermath of a global pandemic is heartless. I am disappointed in OPWDD's callous behavior toward the vulnerable New Yorkers they are charged with protecting. We applaud Senator Carlucci for his efforts to restore these cuts, and we are hopeful that the state pays attention to this urgent matter."

Susan Constantino, Cerebral Palsy Association of NYS President and CEO said, "The proposed vacancy rate cuts are ill-timed, destructive, and completely unnecessary. The cuts would penalize individuals with I/DD for going to the hospital, receiving therapy, and even for visiting family. At best, characterizing these cuts as being for 'empty beds' shows a misunderstanding of how residential services are provided. At worst, they are disrespectful of New Yorkers with I/DD, their families, and the professionals throughout the state that care for and support them."

Constantino noted that OPWDD realized savings during the COVID-19 crisis through reduced service provision, while voluntary providers saw increased staffing and safety expenses.

"The state needs to capitalize on the savings they realized during the crisis and find a way to balance its books that doesn't abandon its constitutional obligation to adequately provide for New Yorkers with disabilities," **she said.**

Community-based residential programs allow New York's most vulnerable an affordable place to live, where in some cases individuals can receive 24/7 supervision. More than 37,000 individuals utilize community-based residential programs. Additionally, \$75 million (16%) of annual gross funding is proposed to be cut from CCO's, which provide coordination of health care, behavioral health and developmental disability services to New Yorkers who qualify for OPWDD services. Funding cuts will increase caseloads, exacerbate existing inequities, and devastate people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families who rely on

CCO services every day.

Through the federal CARES Act, New York received \$5.1 billion. The State Comptroller has said it could go towards payroll costs for public health employees, such as Direct Service Professionals. Senator Carlucci has written to the Commissioner of OPWDD to find out the status of this funding and introduced legislation (S.8557) to speed up it's delivery.

"This federal funding will be critical in softening the blow of these devastating cuts," **said Carlucci.**

Carlucci added the HEROES Act, which has passed in Congress, could provide necessary funding to help prevent massive cuts to our nonprofit providers, but the U.S. Senate has failed to take up the bill.