



Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

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Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Testimony New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

State Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget Proposal February 5, 2021

Good morning Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mannion, Gunther, Abinanti and other distinguished members of the Legislature. I am Ted Kastner, Commissioner of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about Governor Cuomo's Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget and how it benefits the more than 126,000 New Yorkers served by OPWDD.

Governor Cuomo continues to make strategic investments in the OPWDD service system designed to maintain access, increase equity and enhance the sustainability of our community-based, person-centered service system. These investments have enabled OPWDD to invest approximately \$710 million in the salaries of direct support professionals (DSPs) and clinical staff since January 1, 2015.

These investments have also enabled OPWDD to increase the number of individuals supported through most of our programs, including: the Home and Community-Based Waiver which increased by 27.9% over the past seven years; Self-Direction which increased by 161% over the past 4 years; independent living arrangements which increased by 170% in the past 8 years, day program and employment options which increased by 11% over the last five years; and an increase in the number of people receiving respite by 22 percent during the last five years. In addition, our Care Coordination Organizations increased enrollments by 6% during the past year from 103,500 to 109,700 between July 2019 to June 2020.

OPWDD also continues to offer housing supports in the community to more than 36,000 people who are currently living in certified community-based residential programs. These residential opportunities are alone supported by a total of \$5.2 billion in public resources annually.

The Governor's FY 2022 Budget builds upon these accomplishments. Despite the global pandemic, in FY 2022, growth in State spending on OPWDD programs will increase to almost \$4 billion, or more than \$9.1 billion when all shares funding is included. These new resources, which increase State spending on OPWDD supports by about \$110 million or 2.8% year-over-year, will fund Minimum Wage Increases for Staff in the Non-Profit Sector with a new investment of \$32 million in State resources which equates to \$58 million in all shares funding to support the transition to a \$15/hour minimum wage.

The new resources will also support new services for OPWDD-eligible individuals and their families for the eighth consecutive year and commits an additional \$15 million in new capital funding to continue efforts to expand the availability of affordable housing opportunities for the 7th consecutive year.

In addition, the budget supports OPWDD's ongoing efforts to enhance our ability to deliver person centered services. In FY 2022, OPWDD will increase access to residential services in the most integrated settings by expanding the options available to individuals across our continuum of supports including apartments with wrap-around support and Family Care. OPWDD will also assist individuals who have aged-out of their residential schools to move to appropriate adult residential opportunities. OPWDD will continue to allow individuals to receive community habilitation and respite using tele-modalities and make investments in respite opportunities for those families in need of short-term support. Finally, we will enhance and strengthen the quality of research for people with developmental disabilities by transitioning the Institute for Basic Research from OPWDD to the Office for Mental Health, leveraging their research expertise. OMH will work with its partners, including the NYS Psychiatric Institute, to improve and expand the quality and scope of research activities supporting our needs.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the impact that COVID-19 has had on our community. Our highest priority has always been to preserve the health and safety of our individuals and families. I deeply appreciate the extraordinary sacrifices that individuals and families have made. Our response to COVID-19 has been made possible only by the incredible work of the direct support professionals and clinical staff who daily have demonstrated courage, commitment and compassion in supporting individuals with developmental disabilities over this past year. These amazing women and men have been at the front lines of our war against the pandemic and I am personally grateful for their continued dedication. Finally, the many leaders of our voluntary provider organizations, in addition to our State operations staff, have been fully engaged in this effort and have been key partners in quickly and effectively mounting our statewide response.

Our response to the pandemic included creation of a COVID-19 specific data reporting system that was later expanded to include mandatory reporting through a 24-hour hotline which informed deployment of statewide resources. We dedicated over 100 staff to contact tracing efforts within our system of supports. We provided financial and regulatory relief to service providers, issued over 80 guidance documents and offered countless trainings to assist providers in ensuring the health and safety of our families, individuals and their staff. We also quickly launched mitigation and containment efforts which included visitation restrictions and program suspensions, worked with providers to establish additional facilities to treat and house individuals who contracted the virus both in residential settings and in the community, and greatly expanded provider flexibility through Appendix K and Waiver authorities.

We have met regularly (at the onset of the pandemic this occurred several times daily), and continue to meet bi-weekly, with all of our stakeholder groups including provider associations, family and self-advocacy support groups, and Care Coordination Organizations, to share information, including data related to COVID infections, for feedback and to answer questions. We

have also revamped our website and integrated a new list service application to help us improve our communication with all stakeholders.

The pandemic has taught us a lot about being flexible and we've made a number of changes to the way services are delivered in our system. One of these changes is the delivery of tele-services. We support the Governor's executive proposal to expand telehealth services, which will make services more accessible for individuals, particularly those in rural areas of the state.

With these thoughts in mind, I want to thank you for your continued partnership and your support for individuals with developmental disabilities. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.