

CDPAP Senate Hearing 8-21-25: Oral Testimony of Heather M. Burroughs

Hello, my name is Heather Burroughs. I live in Rochester with my husband and our four children. I'm here as a mother and professional who has spent decades inside strained education, healthcare, and nonprofit systems.

When my daughter Devyn was denied an ADA accommodation in school, the DOJ intervened. Our eight-year federal court battle set a national precedent. During that fight we were introduced to CDPAP, which secured care and Devyn's dignity and safety.

Being here today feels like the worst kind of déjà vu, but I stand ready to advocate for her voice and the dignity of choice for all New Yorkers.

Devyn is 18 — nonspeaking, legally blind, medically complex, and brilliant. For 13 years, CDPAP let us hire trusted caregivers who respected her communication style, medical needs, and aspirations. Our FI, All American, knew us and kept our care stable.

That peace of mind was shattered when local FIs were bankrupted and the program was handed to a corporation notorious for violations and failed contracts.

This was never about saving money — only about who pockets it. Officials knew harm would follow, but gambled few would notice or care. Which may be why so little has been done, but this hearing is the chance to finally address our urgent concerns:

- from undisclosed wages to faulty tech
- false alerts harassing caregivers to punch out
- inaccurate or missing wages
- so-called “benefits” that cause harm

Instead of offering support, DOH spent tax dollars on a media campaign exaggerating costs and vilifying FIs. **The Commissioner promised less abuse, faster pay, and no loss of care. Instead, PPL has given us:**

- A timekeeping app that gets pay wrong and likely bills Medicaid wrong too.
- Wage theft so severe caregivers can't afford groceries or rent.
- Nearly one-third of consumers pushed out of CDPAP.
- With 77,000 forced into more expensive care.

Safeguards that protect others were bypassed.

- CMS approval wasn't sought
- The Comptroller's oversight was blocked
- PPL was favored before bidding began

- Which is why the FBI, DOJ, and CMS are investigating

This was a smash and grab. Big-business interests got rich and ditched, so what happens now?

- When 100,000 Uber drivers had payroll issues, there was national outrage.
- Four times as many caregivers are being harmed by PPL.
- They are one of the state's largest workforces — and your constituents.
- Where is the Department of Labor? Do they think so little of the disability community that they feel justified ignoring unprecedented violations against those who serve us?

If DOH was "closely monitoring this rollout" as they claim, why did they postpone this hearing, disregarding PTO, care schedules, and travel we arranged? **We hoped they'd use that extra time to fix their mess, but instead they handed PPL a getaway car.**

As PPL leadership walked out, they bragged to the media that they had done exactly what the state intended them to do. Their first honest statement — and damning. Proof PPL was hired to do what they always do: drive down enrollment no matter the human cost, often costing the state more.

Meanwhile, their non-secure platform has allowed caregiver paychecks to be rerouted overseas. Even then, the Governor's office defended PPL, the entity robbing us.

I will close with a glimpse of the human toll of this rollout.

- My friends Steve, paralyzed in a crash, and Flip, who has CP, were stuck in institutions as young adults.
- Steve and Flip have said they will not call 9-1-1 if they don't have enough care — they'd rather risk death at home than be forced back into an institution.

My daughter Devyn remembers visiting me at work, where Steve and Flip lived. She fears that could be her future. Anxiety is so high she had to start a new med. My nights are restless with what-ifs, and the toll on my health is real. I must stay strong, because if we lose our caregivers, it falls on me to meet Devyn's 24/7 needs.

Families in crisis shouldn't have to pray to outlive their children. We know we are not a priority, or the state wouldn't be inflicting trauma most often seen in combat veterans. We don't feel our families are New York's fight — we feel beat up with no way out of survival mode.

People like me have softened the truth to lower panic, but without reliable pay, caregivers walk away, heartbroken that consumers are unsafe without life-sustaining care.

I worked in a 500-bed nursing home during the pandemic and know what stress is. This is different — because this crisis was manufactured, this devastation avoidable.

There is blood on the Governor's hands. You don't have to share in the consequences of her decisions. Act with courage. End this attack on human rights and protect our most vulnerable.

Investigate the contract. End the monopoly. Reopen trusted FIs.

People will remember who spoke up, and who looked away. History will judge this legislature. The proof won't be in your press releases — it will be in the obituaries of those who were counting on you to make this right. Choose courage now, be on the right side of history!