

Senator Pam Helming

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State Leaders Meet with Providers to Strengthen Support for New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities

Senator Helming and OPWDD Commissioner Willow Baer Engage Finger Lakes Providers to Discuss Priorities and Strengthen Support for the IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) Community



FINGER LAKES, NY — New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Commissioner Willow Baer visited the Finger Lakes region this month, where she and Senator Pam Helming met with local organizations that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The visit, prompted by an invitation from Senator Helming, showcased collaboration between state leaders, providers, and community partners dedicated to improving quality of life for individuals and families. Senator Helming worked to encourage discussion on improving access to residential and day programs, expanding employment opportunities, addressing workforce challenges, and ensuring sustainable funding for these essential services.

“Our providers ensure continuity of care and consistency of support for individuals and families who often have nowhere else to turn,” said Senator Pam Helming. “They support the IDD community at every stage of life—from children to adults—helping people stay connected to their communities and avoid unnecessary hospitalizations. I was proud to welcome Commissioner Baer to the Finger Lakes to hear directly from providers about the challenges they

face, including workforce and the need for more on-site services to better support individuals and families.”

In Livingston County, Commissioner Baer and Senator Helming visited Arc GLOW, meeting with CEO Martin Miskell, board members, and staff who support individuals in residential and employment programs. Stops included the Grammas IRA home in Geneseo and Hilltop in Mount Morris, a prevocational center serving 60 individuals preparing for community employment opportunities. They also toured the Leicester Building, home to Arc GLOW’s Day Hab WOW, Community-Based Prevocational, and Recreation programs supporting nearly 100 individuals across the region.

In Canandaigua, Senator Helming hosted a lunch with the Commissioner, regional OPWDD leadership and representatives from the Mary Cariola Center, including President and CEO Karen Zandi, Director of Community Services Anna Lynn Brink, and board members Dr. Holly Brown and Dr. Anne Francis. The discussion focused on workforce recruitment, service flexibility, and aligning state policy with local needs.

The day concluded at The Arc Ontario’s Employment and Training Center, where they were joined by Executive Director John Astles, Associate Executive Director Carol Williams, and Erica Dayton of the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation to discuss how meaningful employment opportunities empower individuals and strengthen communities.

“We are so proud of the innovative and high-quality programming delivered by OPWDD providers throughout the state, and the Finger Lakes is certainly no exception. The historic investments in the direct support workforce by Governor Kathy Hochul and the Legislature are paying off at programs like those visited. Programs that serve as staples in their communities for providing enriching environments where people live, learn, grow, and thrive. I thank Senator Helming for her support of the developmental disabilities service system, and I look forward to continuing our work together to create a more inclusive New York,” said Commissioner Willow Baer.

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