



**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE
NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE**

**Joint Hearing of the
Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees**

**2022-2023 Executive Budget
Mental Hygiene**

February 14, 2022

Presented
by
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Good afternoon Committee Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mannion, Brouk, Gunther Abinanti and members of the Senate Finance Committee, Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and the Mental Health and Disabilities Committees. Thank you for your ongoing support of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Governor Hochul's 2022-23 budget proposal.

The InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc. (IAC) is a membership organization of over 150 voluntary, not-for-profit providers of services for individuals with developmental disabilities, and their families, in the New York City metropolitan region, along with associate members in other parts of the state. Our membership operates early intervention programs, preschools, schools, residences, clinics, employment and day services, and family support programs with a daily capacity of 100,000.

We are grateful to the Legislature for your prior commitment to our services and the people we support, and our workforce, without whom we are nothing. And this year we are grateful to the Governor who has proposed a budget that has given us hope for the future. We are optimistic that together, and with our new Commissioner, we can create a well-staffed, flexible, responsive service system that meets the needs of New Yorkers with I/DD and their families.

OPWDD BUDGET BACKGROUND

With continually rising expenses, spending reductions and virtually no COLA or trend for inflation since 2010, our providers are experiencing an unprecedented crisis. The rising cost of workers comp, liability insurance, employee health care costs (which have risen by nearly double digits annually), rent and the myriad other fixed costs involved in providing services have left us no choice but to allow staff salaries to stagnate. Dating as far back as 1993, a Medicaid trend was provided every year. These increases enabled providers to keep salaries competitive and maintain fiscal health while providing needed services. Fiscal neglect has led to the system's current lack of stability, with many providers financial status falling well below acceptable norms for liquidity and other performance ratios. COVID-19 exposed and exacerbated our weaknesses.

COLA

We are grateful for the Governor's inclusion of the 5.4% Human Services COLA in this year's budget. The flexibility it provides will allow agencies to spend where it's needed including the rising costs of employee health benefits, rising fixed costs including insurance and rent, coverage of previously provided staff increases made in an attempt to address alarmingly high staff vacancies, with no guarantee of funding to support them, increases for other front line worker salaries in addition to DSPs and other expenditures that are necessary to provide quality services to the people in their care. We appreciate last year's COLA and grateful that we are poised to receive the second meaningful annual COLA in a decade.

WORKFORCE BONUSES

Additionally, we applaud the Governor's provision of the frontline healthcare worker bonuses of up to \$3000 but ask that the requirements be changed slightly so that part time workers at an average of least 15 hours and full time workers over 30+ hours will be eligible.

WORKFORCE SALARY INCREASES

While bonuses and the COLA will enable us to increase payments to our front line workforce, we recognize the need to make a permanent correction to salaries for these workers who support people in living the kind of lives that the rest of us take for granted. We request that any discussions regarding salary increases for front line workers include DSPs and the other staff that people with I/DD and their families depend on 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

PERSONAL REFUNDABLE TAX CREDIT

An additional way to put money into the pockets of our lowest paid workers and support our recruitment efforts is a personal, refundable tax credit as proposed by S.7643/A.9200. We support this legislation and ask that it be included in the final budget.

NURSES ACROSS NEW YORK

Clinical and Nursing staff are also in desperately short supply – we support the Governor's initiative to provide tuition loan forgiveness through the Nurses Across New York program and ask that OPWDD and OMH funded programs are included as eligible workplaces for this initiative.

CONCLUSION

We are optimistic for the first time in a long while –our staffing crisis will not be solved overnight, and even sizable investments will take time to make the difference we need to create the future we are looking toward. There are many areas in need of attention including residential services, infrastructure development and regulatory reform. We look forward to continuing to participate with OPWDD in the 5.07 planning process as we work toward developing and achieving our shared goals for the future.