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July 23, 2021

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dr. Theodore Kastner, Commissioner  
Office for People with Developmental Disabilities  
44 Holland Ave  
Albany, NY 12229

Senator John W. Mannion  
Senate Committee on Disabilities, Chair  
814 LOB  
Albany, NY 12247

Re: Direct Service Professional Shortage for Developmental Disability Community

Dear Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Kastner, and Chair Mannion:

As you are all acutely aware, the intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) community was especially hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many other industries, services and supports, the I/DD service delivery system is in a dire state in the wake of the pandemic with critical need for immediate action. Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are essential to New York's "care economy" as they work to ensure the needs of individuals with I/DD are met so they can continue to lead fulfilling lives. Unfortunately, we have heard from numerous residents that the State is facing a severe shortage in DSPs, which threatens the quality care of those with I/DD. Given this shortage, we implore you to take immediate action to ensure that the State adequately incentivizes job training and retention to boost the workforce in this field.

According to the recently released—and aptly named—New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) Report, *I/DD Workforce Emergency*, an NYDA survey from January 1, 2021, through April 30, 2021, which included data from more than 100 provider agencies, there was a 74.3% increase in the staff vacancy rate from pre-pandemic levels. Furthermore, 93% of provider agencies reported a decrease in applicants in the first quarter of 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare not only how unprepared our State—and our nation as a whole—was for such a public health emergency, it highlighted various ways in which we have not met the challenges of adequately addressing the needs of some of our most vulnerable even before the pandemic. As devastating as this pandemic has been to us all, we now have an opportunity to build back better than we were before. Boosting the DSP workforce to meet the demand will no doubt be a challenge that will require creative and innovative solutions. The NYDA report offered several recommendations on how this can be done, including a pilot program with the Capital Region BOCES to provide work-based learning opportunities, job mentoring and curriculum-based training opportunities to high school students enrolled in the program.

Given the sometimes complex medical and therapeutic needs of those with I/DD, a high level of skill and responsibility is needed for those working as DSPs, and so it is essential that we do all we can to support those who seek this invaluable role in our communities. While we understand that the State Department of Health recently released a spending plan for the expenditure of the funds provided by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, that is expected to direct funds to this cause, the situation must be addressed immediately and cannot be delayed while the state seeks federal approval for its spending plan.

Respectfully, we ask that you each make addressing this critical DSP staffing shortage an immediate priority so that we can ensure individuals with I/DD can enjoy the quality of life that all are entitled to.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and we look forward to working with you on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Senator Sue Serino  
41<sup>st</sup> District



Senator Mike Martucci  
42<sup>nd</sup> District