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January 15, 2021

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

Re: Reopening New York State Adult Day Health Care Programs

I am writing to you with grave concerns about the State's failure to prioritize the thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers who are served by Adult Day Health Care programs. While the State has reopened every other healthcare setting that had to close during the COVID-19 pandemic, Adult Day Health Care programs have been closed for in-person care since March and still await information on when they can reopen in any such capacity. As you know, these programs serve vulnerable individuals with physical or mental impairments, and it is critical that the State immediately provides guidance for these providers that would allow them to offer in-person care as soon as possible.

While I applaud your commitment to expanding access to telehealth services—services that can greatly benefit the populations served by Adult Day Health Care programs who may otherwise have difficulty traveling for in-person appointments—it is essential to keep in mind that telehealth should not serve as a replacement for in-person care, but rather a supplement. Many of the individuals served by these programs require care and assistance that cannot be provided over the phone, and their lack of access to in-person care has unfortunately led to caregivers and program directors noticing significant mental and physical declines in those they serve. Furthermore, the Department of Health has prevented the acceptance of new enrollees in such programs, including for telehealth, denying individuals the ability to receive the care they need.

The importance of social interaction should also not be forgotten when considering the needs of these individuals. Although precautions are certainly necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly for those that are especially susceptible to complications from the virus, that does not mean they should be isolated for months at a time. Receiving in-person care in a safe environment abiding by strict safety protocols would help to meet the physical, mental and social needs of enrollees, especially those that are lacking support outside such programs.

The populations served by Adult Day Health Care programs have often been overlooked by the State and Federal Government, particularly when it comes to funding as these programs did not receive any major

federal relief in response to the pandemic. Continued closure of these programs is not sustainable for the operators or for the individuals they served, which is why the State needs to take proactive steps to empower them to safely reopen—just as these programs have taken proactive steps to prepare to safely reopen as soon as the State will allow them. As you rightly noted during the first portion of your State of the State Address, the State needs to reopen, but we cannot leave any New Yorkers behind in the process.

Adult Day Health Care programs stand at the ready to safely reopen, and have even noted an ability to help distribute vaccinations to the critical population they serve. I respectfully request that you make the reopening of these programs a top priority so that thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers can begin to access the services they desperately need.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter, and I look forward to working with you on this urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Serino". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Senator Sue Serino
41st District