

I am the parent of a person with a developmental disability served by OPWDD. I am a member of Supporting Our Youth & Adults Network, Inc. (SOYAN). I want to address my concerns within the proposed 2022-23 Budget to ensure NYS is meeting the needs of people with developmental disabilities as they age, and the trials and tribulations of their health, social and financial needs to remain self-determined and independent. There are multiple concerns, but I will focus here on my top 4 concerns:

1. Housing Opportunities. I see that OPWDD plans to allocate funds to explore creating a continuum of new provider-led housing options. Funds assigned to 'housing opportunities' must include increased funding for integrated community opportunities. I recommend allocating funds for a Statewide Housing Taskforce to address the needs and desires of people with developmental disabilities and their families before allocating funds to any pilot programs or initiatives. The legislature should meet with the community to hear our concerns and our needs. I worry about where my child will live when I am gone. I want to know there are choices that align with my child's need for support and full community integration. Every parent with a child with developmental disabilities worries about the future of their loved ones when they are no longer able to take care of them or they die. It is something my husband and myself think about every single day. We need to be involved in this planning for our adult son.

2. Increase to the OPWDD Housing Subsidy: I understand that the Fair Market Rate (FMR) used to calculate subsidies available to Self-Direction participants will be raised in 2022 (to \$1669 for a one bedroom and less than that for a studio), as it had not been adjusted since 2012. That is outstanding news. We hope that this adjustment will occur annually, to keep up with increases in the local rental market. We also request one more important modification: Since individuals' housing subsidies are calculated as the FMR rate minus 30% of their income after adjusting for allowable expenses which include utilities (heat and electricity), Internet should be added as an allowable Utility adjustment to income. This change would be consistent with policy change within the Social Security Administration, recognizing that internet is no longer a luxury, but a necessity that allows many people to access their services.

3. The Rights of People with Disabilities: I am grateful for the Executive's reinstatement of the Office of the Chief Disability Officer who will address issues of access. The developmental disability community also needs an Ombuds Program to support individual assistance navigating the complex system of services and care coordination intended to provide for their needs and choices.

4. Pay a living wage to DSPs: Bonuses for employment longevity and vaccination acknowledges the present moment and the past. There are many valued DSPs working part-time within self-direction and provider-led residential and day services who would not be eligible under the current bonus structure, but who we want to reward and retain. Can the Legislature amend the language to include part-time employees who work 15 hours per week and to reduce the top tier average to 35 hours? NYS needs an infusion of people willing to work. NYS must ensure the people who choose to provide life-affirming supports for our loved-ones with developmental disabilities are paid a living wage: NYS must make a commitment to long term support for wage increases, not just one-time bonuses.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the NYS budget process for 2022-23. Consider my recommendations to ensure that New York State remains committed to providing people with developmental disabilities dignity and full community integration.

Best regards,  
Susan Hershman  
Child Development Specialist  
Parent of a 30 year son with Autism