



Self-Advocacy Association of New York State 2019 Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing Testimony

February 7, 2019

New York's citizens with developmental disabilities have always sought to have meaningful roles within their communities. However, barriers within the formal service system and communities in general often get in the way.

While it is true that people with developmental disabilities continue to require innovative and person-centered services, it is equally true that they need many of the same things that other New Yorkers need. Access to affordable housing is necessary for people with developmental disabilities, as well as their neighbors. Transportation systems must work for people with disabilities, as well as the wider regions that they serve. Meaningful employment is particularly important to New Yorkers with developmental disabilities but good work at a living wage is essential for strong communities for everyone.

We ask that NYS recognize that supporting good lives for people with developmental disabilities is closely linked with creating and supporting inclusive communities that meet the diverse needs of all citizens.

Housing:

Just like many other citizens in NYS, people with developmental disabilities are often held back from achieving their dreams and maximizing their independence and contributions to their community because of the prohibitive cost of housing. We stand with other members of our communities across NYS who need access to housing which they can afford. Housing must be affordable for all not just for some.

Lack of affordable housing can lead to poor health outcomes and increased care costs overall. Investments in affordable housing lead to desirable outcomes for New York's citizens and the communities they reside in. Failing to invest only increase poor outcome within communities and increased cost to the state in terms of more expensive health care and other services.

While NYS continues invest heavily in traditional services and certified group homes that are needed by some, it is equally important to equally invest in more independent and innovative services and housing opportunities.

Support Workforce, #befair2directcare:

As a member organization of the #befair2direct care coalition SANYS is grateful to the legislature and Governor Cuomo for the investment in direct support professional wages and ask that it continues over the coming years.

High staff vacancy and turnover rates mean that people are not getting the lives that they deserve. In this situation people experience a limitation in choice, and face risks to their dignity, safety and well-being. This is a crisis that must be solved on behalf of New Yorkers with developmental disabilities and the Direct Support Professionals that stand behind them every day.

Transportation:

Transportation continues to be a significant area of need for New Yorkers with disabilities. Paratransit is still not available for many people within their communities or availability is limited. People in rural areas suffer greatly from a lack of public transportation options. We ask that NYS take this problem seriously. We know that there is no easy solution. However, what is clear is that it merits immediate attention.

Accessible and affordable transportation needs to be a central consideration of all development and community planning. It is also important that investment in new certified homes for people with disabilities require sustainable transportation plans. Too often, people are finding their access to employment, and the community-at-large, limited.

To ensure adequate transportation services, public planning should include people with disabilities in the planning stages, by active invitation and by being held in locations that are accessible via para transit or other means available to people with disabilities. We would like to see New York explore innovative solutions both in urban and rural areas such as funds for paying a neighbor, or ridesharing projects.

Federal Cuts to Medicaid:

Potential changes to Federal funding for health care is of great concern to people with developmental disabilities across the state who depend on health care to lead independent lives in their communities and avoid greater health care costs down the line.

While we know that this is a federal issue, we would also urge our New York State representatives to commit to fully funding our system of services and supports through OPWDD as well as other state healthcare systems. A decrease in funding would wipe out the progress towards independence and efficiency that our system has achieved.

Disability Awareness:

Too often, people with developmental disabilities are marginalized within their own communities. New York's citizens with Developmental Disabilities would benefit greatly from

NYS investing in a statewide Developmental Disabilities awareness campaign focused on recognizing New York's Citizens with Developmental Disabilities as valued members of their communities.

About SANYS

SANYS is an organization founded by people with Developmental Disabilities for people with Developmental Disabilities. We have been "Speaking Up for Ourselves and Others" for over 30 years.

The above statements represent views of the Board of Directors and Members of the SANYS. For more information, or to schedule a meeting or visit, please contact: Arnold Ackerley, Administrative Director at aackerley@sanys.org or 518-603-6706.