



AILEEN M. GUNTHER
Assemblywoman 100th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

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Mental Health Committee

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January 17, 2017

Hon. Carl E. Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly
LOB 932
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Speaker Heastie:

We are writing to respectfully request the Assembly include \$45 million in its one-house budget proposal in order to help provide direct support professionals (DSPs) with a living wage.

Direct support professionals are working long hours for little pay while providing supports and services to people with developmental disabilities. Their work is deserving of much more than the minimum wage. DSPs are highly skilled, must support people with any and all needs, and often must help manage challenging behaviors. Our State's non-profit providers are no longer able to offer them competitive compensation. DSPs are finding higher wages elsewhere and are leaving the field at an alarming rate. 90% of providers' revenue comes from public dollars, more than 80% of which goes to worker compensation. Therefore, any increase in DSP wages must come from additional investments by the State.

Due to minimal funding by the State for several years, providers are struggling to attract new workers and are losing experienced workers who may have been in the field for decades. Providers saw a 20% increase in staff vacancy rates from 2014 to 2015, a rate that now stands at 10% on average, statewide. Providers also had a 21% increase in direct support staff one-year turnover rates from 2014 to 2015, a rate that now stands at 23% on average, statewide. These rates are unsustainable.

If New York State does not make major investments in the direct support workforce this year, many providers risk closing their doors due to staffing shortages. Our request for the inclusion of \$45 million in the Assembly's one-house budget proposal is based on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage Model for New York State, and would equate to a 2.3% annual increase. This would be the first year of a 6-year commitment by the State that will eventually create a living wage for direct support workers. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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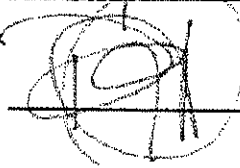
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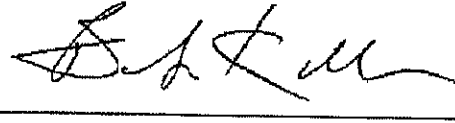
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