



**Self-Advocacy Association of New York State
2018 Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing
Testimony**

February 13, 2018

New York State's system of services for people with disabilities is undergoing a big change. Part of the intent of this change is to create more community integration and choice for people with disabilities. Funding is needed so that this change meets that goal in a real way in our lives.

For people with disabilities, solutions need to consider a full range of supports and services to ensure that the person has meaningful choice and sustainable opportunities for independence and inclusion. It is important to consider housing, staffing, transportation and employment opportunities together when planning development for people with developmental disabilities.

In addition to people with DD, there are many people in need of housing and better services (veterans, the elderly, people with mental health concerns). We urge the legislature to think of how to mobilize communities to bring all its members together to offer solutions and create real communities.

Housing:

While New York's citizens with developmental disabilities are grateful for NYS and OPWDD's ongoing investment in housing. We must point out that the development and/or expansion of legacy services continues to be invested in more heavily than in independent housing alternatives.

While HCBS compliant group homes may serve some well, there they are not always the least restrictive setting. The currently proposed budget will make a significant investment of \$120 million in legacy services. Investment in independent options will be \$15 million. We want to see more equality of investment between group homes and independent settings. Likewise, we are looking for investment and creative solutions to employment and day services options. Traditional day programming is not a meaningful solution for many and we want to see better options. Employment opportunities must become more available for New Yorkers with disabilities as we are one of the most underemployed groups in the state.

Support Workforce, #bfaifair2directcare:

As a member organization of the #bfaifair2direct care coalition SANYS is grateful to the legislature and Governor Cuomo for the investment in direct support professional wages that is occurring this fiscal year. Unfortunately, the problem has only grown worse. In 2017 staff vacancy rates increased by 30% and turnover rates increased by 8%. It is important to note that there are lives behind these numbers. 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. It is also the case that people in rural areas suffer greatly from a lack of public transportation options and 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. We ask that NYS invest in problem solving this issue through time, talent and funding. 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 for future residents. Too often people are finding their access to employment, and the community at large, limited. 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. The Self-Advocacy Association is committed to continued dialogue with our Federal representatives, but 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.

We, the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State, ask that you consider today's meeting as the beginning of a dialogue with self-advocates for the upcoming year. We ask that you consider the above principles anytime you are engaged in planning that impacts New Yorkers with developmental disabilities. We look forward to speaking with you further in the near future.

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.