



## **Joint Budget Hearing of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees on the FY 2017-2018 Executive Budget Proposal**

Monday, February 6, 2017

We at the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS) have been supporting people with Disabilities to speak for themselves for over thirty years. We are an organization founded by and for New Yorkers with developmental disabilities. Our board of directors is comprised of people with developmental disabilities and employs professionals to support its important mission.

In the past year, having recognized a crisis in Direct Support Professional (DSP) staffing, SANYS has joined a coalition of nine other highly regarded organizations to support the #bfair2directcare campaign. It has become increasingly clear that DSP's are not receiving a fair wage, nor are they being offered a fair wage through the Governor's current plan. While we are grateful that the Governor's Budget increases funding to OPWDD overall we are deeply disappointed to see that our coalition's wage concerns have not been addressed.

As individuals with developmental disabilities, we cannot overstate the importance of Direct Support Professionals to our overall quality of life. To put it simply, New Yorkers with developmental disabilities we not only, at times, require the support of DSP's for the most intimate personal needs, but frequently need direct support services to maximize our contributions to our communities as well as local and state economies. Without reliable direct support professionals, many of us will be unable to work, shop and even vote with any regularity and will not be able to participate in community life to the degree that they wish.

It is important that DSP's are finally recognized for the highly skilled professionals that they are. DSP's accept a profound responsibility and act on behalf of the public good; they deserve a fair wage. If the Governor's budget remains unchanged, that will not happen; they will not receive a

fair wage in the future. The work that DSP's do is worth more than a "minimum" wage. It must be recognized that paying DSP's a minimum wage will continue to result in staff leaving for other careers. This will leave New Yorkers with Disabilities without the support that we need. Support, support that we have trusted NYS will ensure is available to us.

Too many New Yorkers with developmental disabilities are tired of seeing conscientious DSP's who have become an important part of their lives, and successes, leave for other careers because DSP's are no longer offered the competitive wages they were in the past.

More and more DSP's are working more than one job which can lead to burnout. To be effective, DSP's need to be happy and energetic. Financial stressors and fatigue make this increasingly difficult and as the quality of life of DSP's decreases so does the quality of life for New Yorkers with developmental disabilities.

When we see the high rates of DSP vacancies, hear time and time again, that staff are unavailable or that Service Providers are short "staffed"; the more we are faced with unfamiliar staff who are working overtime to fill in for vacancies, the more we know that our lives are being put on hold until this crisis is resolved.

Therefore, we urge you to recognize that a victory for the #bfair2direct care campaign is also a victory for New Yorkers with developmental disabilities. In truth, it will be a victory for all New Yorkers. We urge you to petition the Governor to amend his budget or, if this fails, to include the \$45 million in necessary state funds in the one-house budget.

Please remember, that offering a fair wage to Direct Support Professionals is also an investment in the lives of the more than half a million New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

On behalf of the board of Directors of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State,

Clint Perrin, Policy Director  
&  
Arnold Ackerley, Administrative Director