



Testimony submitted for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on Health 2023-2024 Executive Budget

January 23, 2024

The New York State Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NYSSLHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony relating to the SFY 2024-2025 Budget. NYSSLHA is a statewide professional association representing speech-language-pathologists and audiologists and individuals served by members of these professions.

NYSSLHA is deeply invested in the success and effectiveness of the New York State Early Intervention (EI) Program. Many of NYSSLHA's members provide EI services as independent providers and agency owners or employees. For many years, NYSSLHA has advocated strongly for increasing EI reimbursement rates by at least 11% following significant cuts over the last two decades. We commend the Governor for including a 5% rate increase for in-person EI services, as well as the planned 4% rate modifier for rural and underserved areas that would commence in SFY 2026.

The program has not had a general reimbursement rate increase in over two decades and EI providers have not received a COLA since 2006 when it was eliminated. As a result, more than 2,000 providers have left the EI program in recent years for settings with higher wages. Many NYSSLHA members currently employed in schools or health care settings were forced to leave the EI program due to financial constraints that made an otherwise fulfilling career unsustainable.

In February 2023, the NYS Comptroller issued a report, [Oversight of the Early Intervention Program](#), which found a majority of EI eligible children were not able to receive all the services that their evaluations called for. Moreover, 3,000 eligible children received no services at all. The report indicated that these delays disproportionately impact children of color, who are less likely to receive services within the prescribed time frame. These delays and lapses in care are due to the shortages of therapists because of insufficient rates.

Early intervention services provide one of the biggest returns on investment. The earlier a developmental delay or disability is identified in a young child, and the sooner services begin, the less likely it is that the child will need more intensive and expensive special education services later. Delaying EI services creates greater risk of significant developmental and learning delays and impact on later academic success. Timely access to EI services is critical to a child's developmental path.

Increasing reimbursement rates is the primary solution to reversing this troubling trend, retaining existing EI providers, and attracting new professionals to the program. In these areas, NYSSLHA also supports incorporating coursework and exposure to EI in graduate program curriculum for

relevant professions. NYSSLHA also supports incentivizing provider recruitment through loan forgiveness for EI providers. Prioritizing loan forgiveness for EI providers who choose to work in underserved areas (as provided by A8455, Paulin) is a targeted solution to address access barriers in rural and medically hard to reach areas of the state.

Choosing to enact these types of policies in combination with increased reimbursement would represent the single biggest investment in the state Early Intervention program in decades. While any rate increase is welcome and direly needed, 5% falls short of the minimum needed to adequately invest in this program and catch reimbursement rates up with the past two decades of disinvestment. NYSSLHA urges the Legislature to provide the additional funding necessary to increase EI reimbursement rates by 11% and would welcome action to further incentivize EI provider recruitment through loan forgiveness and better exposure through training curriculum.

NYSSLHA is profoundly grateful for the Legislature's support for the New York State Early Intervention Program and urges your continued investment and prioritization to ensure we can attract and adequately compensate the professionals providing services to the youngest New Yorkers with developmental delays and/or disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. If you have any questions, please contact Kayla Bogdanowicz at kaylab@lobbywr.com.

Respectfully submitted,



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