



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John W. Mannion

## Officials prepping legislative agenda to aid New Yorkers with disabilities

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New York's Chief Disability Officer Kimberly Hill Ridley has been busy since the office was created nearly two years ago.

The office within the Executive Chamber helps connect New Yorkers with disabilities – especially people with physical or sensory disorders – to resources to secure employment, housing, emergency preparation and home care, among others.

"If you're a person with a physical disability or any type of sensory disability, there really is no go-to point in New York for those individuals," Chief Disability Officer Kimberly Hill Ridley said Friday. "Our office solidly represents that group of people."

Hill Ridley said the office has held more than 2,000 meetings with organizations and stakeholders that work with people with disabilities New York, focusing most improving the unemployment rate among New Yorkers with disabilities since the office was created in February 2022. Hill Ridley meets regularly, typically at least biweekly, with Gov. Kathy

Hochul about what New Yorkers with disabilities' most urgent needs.

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Senate Disabilities Committee chair John Mannion carries the bill to increase worker salaries \$4,000 to help recruit and retain employees.

He says he'll also fight to expand the ombudsman program to provide oversight of caregivers for people with developmental disabilities, and mandate the state Office of People with Developmental Disabilities create a staffing plan for workforce emergencies, or vacancies over 10%.

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*"We want to make sure that if faced with staffing challenges, that there is a plan so that we don't reduce services unnecessarily," the senator said.*

Horrigan said providers have an average 17% vacancy rate across the state, and a turnover rate of 30%.

"We need to make sure that we keep our homes open so we can provide services to New York state's most vulnerable people," Horrigan said.

The last three budgets included pay increases for behavioral health workers, but less than the pace of rising inflation. As group homes face closure across the state, Mannion said the industry needs more support.

He and advocates want to tie the pay of direct support professionals to inflation, and avoid a fight for fair pay each year.

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*"It is a challenge – it is a challenge," Mannion said. "But it will be a part of the discussion."*

Mannion carries legislation the Senate Disabilities Committee will prioritize next session, including proposals to establish a housing navigation services program for people with a disability, and expand the independent developmental disability ombudsman program included in this year's budget.