



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## #bFair2DirectCare Campaign Comes to Monroe County

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**HENRIETTA, NY** – The bipartisan **#bFair2DirectCare** campaign to secure a living wage for workers who help New Yorkers with autism, serious brain injury, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities came to the Rochester area today, as lawmakers, families and self-advocates urged Gov. Cuomo and the Legislature to include the necessary funds in the upcoming state budget.

“Direct care providers are the heart of all we do for people with disabilities, but the current funding from New York State is making it increasingly difficult to find and retain qualified

staff,” said Barbara Wale, CEO of the Arc of Monroe. “These dedicated and compassionate workers walk side-by-side and share some of the most intimate aspects of life with the individuals they support, which is why providing consistent staffing is so critical. It’s time for Governor Cuomo and the state Legislature to recognize their skills and knowledge with a wage that reflects the complexity of their work.”

Using living wage metrics that identify the minimum full time salary for meeting the basic necessities, the **#bFair2DirectCare** coalition said \$45 million in new state funds for each of the next six years, that would be matched by federal funds. Advocates said the sum is a small and high-impact investment in the context of a \$156 billion state budget.

Joining Ms. Wale at today’s rally were state Senators Joseph Robach and Robert Ortt; Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle’s Deputy of Communications Director Dana Vernetti; Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb; **Annie Chwiecko**, Director of Community Affairs for **Senator Patrick Gullivan**, 59<sup>th</sup> Senate District; **Sean Delehanty**, Monroe County Legislator, and Chief of Staff for **Assemblyman Mark Johns**, 135<sup>th</sup> Assembly District.

**Senator Joe Robach (R, C, IP), said:** I have always fought for fair and continuous funding for people with developmental disabilities, their families and those who help care for them during my tenure in the State Legislature. Providing fair and adequate wages for Direct Support Professionals will attract more people to this needed workforce, and help to ensure that people and families with developmental and intellectual disabilities receive the proper care they need and deserve on a daily basis.”

**Assembly Minority Leader Kolb (R, C-Canandaigua), said:** “Currently in New York, professional caregivers assisting disabled individuals are on a lower pay scale than teenagers working drive-thrus. This is completely unacceptable and must be addressed in the upcoming legislative session. The services and sacrifices direct care workers provide are among the

most important in any industry and any community. It's time we acknowledge their efforts by increasing funding for these selfless caregivers."

Today's event is the latest in a series of rallies held across the state in a far-reaching campaign on behalf of workers, known as Direct Support Professionals, who care for the 128,000 New Yorkers with developmental disabilities. *#bFair2DirectCare* is also the call to action to remind state leaders that direct care not-for-profit agency workers are agents of the state who need a fair rate of pay which is commensurate with their vital support responsibilities.

**Background:**

After eight years without significant Medicaid rate increases, providers of supports and services for New Yorkers with developmental disabilities face a perfect storm of inadequate funding, new laws, and policies that threaten community integration, the level of support and the civil rights that people with disabilities have achieved.

Organizations that support people with developmental disabilities have seen only one rate increase since the recession of 2008, an average increase of less than one-half of one percent per year. Now they face as much as a 67 percent increase in the mandated minimum wage, new overtime rules and growing competition from other employers.

More than 90 percent of the funding that sustains these organizations comes from the government and 80 percent of that goes directly to staff wages. The only way that these organizations can raise wages for direct support professionals, teachers' aides, drivers, cooks, and others making minimum wage, or a little bit more, is for the government to increase the rates they provide for the delivery of these critical services to New York's most vulnerable citizens.

Currently, fast food restaurants and big box stores are paying as much as, if not more, than those caring for people with disabilities -- a direct result of which is a 21% higher turnover rate in direct support positions between 2014 and 2015 at the Arc of Monroe. Per a 2016 Vacancy and Turnover Survey recently provided by OPWDD, competition from other employers has increased to the point where coalition agencies currently have a nearly 10 percent vacancy rate and more than a 23 percent turnover rate in these important jobs – a significant increase in both vacancies and turnover in just the last year.

**State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities said,** "I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with direct care professionals, individuals in the I/DD community, Arc of Monroe, DDAWNY, and other nonprofit agencies who care for our most vulnerable population. These employees deserve a fair living wage, and I will continue to fight for that this upcoming session. This goes beyond the state's fiscal obligation to these providers - it is a moral imperative to help those most in need."

**Senator Rich Funke (R-C-I, Fairport), said:** "Direct care workers provide essential, high-quality services for some of our most at-risk neighbors, and the need here is only growing. Because their work is so vital, these professionals should have the opportunity to earn the fair wage they rightfully deserve. I'm proud to join partners on both sides of the aisle in calling on Governor Cuomo to be fair to direct care by including \$45 million in additional support in his budget proposal."

**Senator Patrick Gullivan (R-C, IP), said:** "Direct support professionals play a vital role in the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, providing care and respite under often challenging circumstances. They deserve to earn a wage commensurate with the services they provide and I urge the governor to ensure that funding is included in next year's budget to retain and attract the professional staff necessary to meet the needs of

our most vulnerable citizens.”

**Assemblyman Mark Johns (R-C-I, Webster), said:** "I'm a lifelong supporter for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our community. I ask that Governor Cuomo include up to \$45 million in the upcoming budget to provide financial assistance to Direct Support Professionals."

Parent of person served through the Arc of Monroe County, Maricela Guzman: “Consistency makes everything relevant to children with disabilities. They need to predict their day. So, one of the things I look for in an agency is their turnover rate, because I know that, if I change a routine, she becomes extremely overwhelmed and her time is consumed by wondering and asking questions.” Says Maricela Guzman, mother, “When agencies have consistent staffing, it allows DSP’s to establish relationships that are not easily attainable with children with disabilities, only with time. They have a lot of responsibility and should be paid whatever is needed so they can stay longer.”

Those in attendance at the event included; Self-advocates, parents/caregivers, local DSPs; #BFair2DirectCare Coalition partners such as the Arc of Monroe County, the twelve Arc Collaborative of the Finger Lakes members, CP Rochester, CP NYS, The Developmental Disability Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY), Grace Community Services, Happiness House, and People-Inc.; State government officials including Assemblyman-Elect Joseph Errigo and representatives from Senator Patrick Gallivan and Assemblyman Johns offices.