



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## Senator Helming Leading Fight to #BFair2DirectCare in New York State Budget

SENATOR PAM HELMING March 8, 2019

| ISSUE: **BFAIR2DIRECTCARE, DIRECT SERVICE PROFESSIONALS, DIRECT SERVICE PROVIDERS**

ALBANY – Senator Pam Helming today announced that she is joining the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY) and the Collaborative of New York to fight for a living wage for direct care workers. She called on Governor Cuomo and leaders in the Senate and Assembly to include funding to implement a six-year plan that would provide a living wage for direct care workers in this year’s state budget. As a freshman Senator in 2017, Senator Helming led the fight with her Senate colleagues to make sure funding for the first two years of the plan was included in the final budget.

“As someone who began my career as a direct care worker, I fully understand and know firsthand the important role these professionals play in caring for people with developmental disabilities. Direct care professionals dedicate an incredible amount of time and energy to the people they support every day, often going well beyond their job description. They treat our most vulnerable citizens with the utmost respect and dignity, and it is critical that we compensate them with a fair living wage for the work they do. A fair wage means they can remain in their chosen career field without worrying about how they will provide for their families, and it allows the organizations that employ them to have a committed, reliable workforce. I strongly urge the Governor and our legislative leaders to

include funding for direct care workers in this year's state budget," Senator Helming said.

Senator Helming pointed out that the final 2017 state budget provided \$146 million to increase wages for direct care workers and other clinical professionals, but only after she and her Senate Republican colleagues fought for this funding that was not included in the Executive Budget. This critical funding helps nonprofit organizations, such as those represented by DDAWNY and the Collective of New York, appropriately compensate these employees for the important work they do to provide services for individuals with disabilities and care for our most vulnerable citizens. This year's Executive Budget does propose \$62.5 million to continue supporting wage increases for direct care professionals, and Senator Helming and her colleagues will fight to ensure this funding is included in the final adopted budget.

Direct care professionals support people with development disabilities such as autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and other special needs. Without this important funding, these workers will struggle to make ends meet and provide for their families and the nonprofit organizations that employ them will find themselves in a perpetual staffing crisis. Last year, these organizations had a vacancy rate of 14.3 percent and a turnover rate of 26.4 percent for direct care staff. The inability to attract and keep staff forced the nonprofits to pay an astounding 12 million overtime hours in 2018, up 17 percent from the year before and adding \$88 million in cost to the agencies' already strained budgets.

When the six-year plan is fully implemented, direct care professionals would earn a living wage of \$15.50 per hour in upstate New York and \$17.80 per hour in New York City. These workers are highly trained in a wide variety of critical areas that include administering medications, giving first aid and CPR, behavioral interventions, supporting independent living, and ensuring the safety and opportunity of those they support.