



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend urge Governor to rescind proposed cut in funding for persons with disabilities: Say it puts residential facilities, services at risk

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Elmira, N.Y., June 25—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) today called on

Governor Andrew Cuomo to rescind a proposed \$238 million cut to the state Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), set to take effect on July 1, 2020.

The area's state lawmakers said that families of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), as well as residential service providers, have contacted them to express their strong opposition to the proposed cut and explain its consequences.

The OPWDD funding was included in the 2020-2021 state budget enacted in April, however legislative leaders also authorized Cuomo to unilaterally make changes to the budget as the governor sees fit during the COVID-19 response. O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend have been highly critical of the Legislature giving Cuomo the power to revise the state's fiscal plan without legislative approval.

They called the proposed OPWDD cut ill-timed, unnecessary and unfair to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families and caregivers.

In a letter today to the governor, O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend wrote, "The devastating consequences of this funding cut, if enacted, has been brought to our attention by the non-profit providers of residential services, Care Coordination Organizations (CCOs), Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and, in particular, the families of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) for whom these residences and services are irreplaceable lifelines."

O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend highlighted one specific provision of the Cuomo proposal that implements what the administration is calling a "vacancy rate cut" that stops state reimbursement to residential facilities for the time a resident is an inpatient at a hospital being treated for COVID-19 or another illness -- considering that inpatient hospital stay as an "empty bed" for the residential facility that would no longer be eligible for state aid.

That category of funding cut could jeopardize the ability of some facilities to continue operating, the lawmakers said, or at least runs the risk of an individual with an IDD not being able to return to their previous residential facility.

O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend wrote, "Your proposed vacancy rate cut, in our view, is ill-timed, unnecessary and stands only to deliver a callous threat, at this worst possible time, to this vulnerable population and their families and loved ones for whom these community-based residences, programs and services are nothing short of irreplaceable. This population has been and will remain especially at-risk during this pandemic. It will likely account for more frequent inpatient hospital stays. Your administration's 'empty bed' calculation for determining these proposed funding cuts shows a startling and surprising misunderstanding of how these residential services are provided. Worse, it runs the terrible and unconscionable risk of forcing persons with IDD from their homes and their families and caregivers scrambling to arrange and navigate services that are already hard to find and adjust to. It places an unfair and unneeded strain on these individuals and their families and caregivers.

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O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend called on Cuomo and his administration to find a "better, more compassionate and more sensible solution." They said that the 2020-21 state budget included numerous questionable actions -- including a new, taxpayer-funded system of financing political campaigns estimated to cost state and local taxpayers \$200 million -- that should be looked at for cost savings before any essential services are targeted.

“As you well know, the COVID-19 response has taken an enormous toll on every sector across the local, state, and federal spectrum of agencies and organizations. It has and will continue to demand, for the foreseeable future, a constant reassessment and reordering of governmental practices, priorities, and responsibilities, and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your administration on these efforts,” the legislators wrote, “In this specific instance, we would urge your careful reexamination and immediate reconsideration of what would amount to a cut that would only serve to exacerbate the ongoing COVID-19 crisis by imposing an unreasonable hardship on the already hard-pressed IDD service providers and frontline workers who, by the way, we have called on throughout this emergency to protect one of our most vulnerable populations.

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