



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Anthony H. Palumbo

Palumbo: Caregivers for the Intellectual and Developmental Disabled Need Greater State Support

ANTHONY H. PALUMBO March 11, 2021

| ISSUE: **DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES DISABILITY RIGHTS COVID-19 RESPONSE**



Senator Anthony Palumbo (R,C-New Suffolk), member of the State Senate Committee on Mental Health, is working to stop the proposed State Budget cuts to services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), while providing additional funding to OPWDD in order to give caregivers of (I/DD) a long overdue pay increase. Senator Palumbo noted that for years, the state has underpaid group home employees, the same

workers who have now spent over a year caring for some of New York's most vulnerable residents during a pandemic.

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“The men and women who care for New York’s most vulnerable residents haven’t seen a cost of living increase to their pay in over a decade,” said Senator Palumbo. “Even as the State has increased the minimum wage, these workers have been unjustly left behind. Ten years ago, an employee working in a group home made nearly double minimum wage, now they make a dollar less than the \$15 an hour minimum wage. This lack of support has resulted in underpaid employees caring for our most vulnerable residents without the proper PPE and support they need to keep residents and themselves healthy.”

Roy Probeyahn, Chair of the Suffolk County Disabilities Advisory Board shares Senator Palumbo's concerns: “I am the father of 3 adult sons in their 50s with autism. My wife and I have raised them at home to this very day. The staff who help care for our sons in day programs and at home are woefully underpaid for the important work they do, barely minimum wage. The not-for-profit providers they work for have not received a COLA in the last 11 years. NYS has cut funding to OPWDD, which funds these agencies during that time and in the current budget. This is a system in crisis, which is unprepared to meet the challenges of today, nor the promise of a future for our loved ones. They, our most vulnerable citizens, need appropriate care based on their needs. New York State must withdraw the proposed funding cuts to the services for our loved ones in this budget, fund the enhanced service needs required for pandemic recovery and the full range of residential and rehabilitation services so desperately needed. People with I/DD, their families, the providers that support them deserve no less. My sons, and all our loved ones, deserve no less.”

To address these serious concerns and help protect New Yorkers with Intellectual and developmental disabilities Senator Palumbo is calling for:

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- Reverse all proposed cuts to services for New Yorkers with I/DD and reject the deferral of the COLA in this year's budget. This would help support Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), who are the unsung frontline healthcare workers vital to I/DD support and services;
- Reject a 1% across-the-board cut to support and services;
- Reject pending residential cuts to agencies/providers for residents who go home for a visit or are hospitalized;
- Reject the 5% cut to non-Medicaid state aid funding;
- Release \$25 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds to voluntary providers for the recruitment, training and retention of non-supervisory residential DSPs; and
- Enact statutory protection to ensure all cuts to the I/DD system are fully restored if the requested federal funds are received by the state as currently, there is no such guarantee.

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“For too long, New York State has failed its most vulnerable residents and ignored the needs of the intellectually and developmentally disabled,” said Senator Palumbo. “The COVID pandemic has cast a bright spotlight on these failures, but also provides us with the opportunity and urgency to do better for New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the men and women who care for them.”