



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Palumbo: State Must Increase Support for those Who Care for New York's Most Vulnerable Residents

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I was deeply disheartened last month when Governor Hochul vetoed Senate Bill S.6516a, which I co-sponsored and that would provide increased funding to schools that serve students with special needs and the intellectually and developmentally disabled (IDD).

The legislation passed both houses of the State Legislature unanimously and with broad bipartisan support. The bill would have helped to ensure that schools are able to retain and recruit additional employees needed to care for and teach the State's IDD population and provide them with additional services.

A few days later, the governor announced that she would propose a \$240 million increase in funding for these schools in her Executive Budget, resulting in a 15 percent increase, over two years. This is welcome news for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their teachers, and caretakers. For far too long, New York's teachers and caregivers serving our state's most vulnerable residents have been woefully underpaid, in many cases barely making above minimum wage.

In addition to providing increased funding for these schools, New York State must also make a greater investment in direct support professional staff who care for New Yorkers with disabilities. Currently, New York State faces a severe staffing shortage for direct care professionals, lacks resources for programs, and has a backlog of applicants for group homes.

The pandemic has certainly exacerbated this crisis but has also brought the issue to the forefront.

In fact, New York State is flush with COVID relief funds from the federal government so the opportunity to make a long-term commitment and provide greater support for New York's most vulnerable residents is now. It is imperative for the state to act this year to provide greater support for schools, support staff and group homes that care for New York's intellectual and developmentally disabled, while expanding programs for their care.

This is not a Republican or Democrat issue, but one of decency. Societies are judged on how they care for their most vulnerable residents. Sadly, for too long, New York has largely ignored the needs of the intellectually and developmentally disabled.

This year's state budget should address these longstanding funding inadequacies to better serve this community and the dedicated men and women who care for them.