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CIDNY's Testimony on FY 25-26 Health Budget Hearing

The Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1978. We are part of the Independent Living Centers movement, a national network of grassroots and community-based organizations that enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to direct their own lives. CIDNY is the voice of people with disabilities in the five boroughs of New York City. We hereby testify to the bills and legislation below.

Increase funding for Community Health Advocates (CHA), the State's health care consumer assistance program, to \$6.5 million-

Community Health Advocates (CHA) helps New Yorkers understand and use their insurance. CHA's free services are available statewide through a network of community-based organizations and a toll-free helpline. Since 2010, CHA has saved consumers over \$180 million dollars and worked on more than 498,000 cases for people needing help getting the care they need or resolving billing disputes. CHA should be fully funded at \$6.5 million so that New Yorkers can continue to receive this help.

Increase State-share funding for the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) to \$15 million-

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) serves as an advocate and resource for people living in nursing facilities and adult-care institutions. The program works to promote and protect patients' rights as well as their health and safety, by receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints made by or on behalf of residents. LTCOP receives federal funding, but it is insufficient to provide adequate services in New York State, where the match is one of the lowest in the nation. The Legislature should increase the State-share funding of the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program to \$15 million to help address the many serious inadequacies in nursing home and other residential care in the State.

CIDNY Supports Fair Pay for Home Care Act:

An ongoing home care worker shortage has made it difficult for people to obtain home

care and has worsened to the point of crisis throughout the State. The home care crisis has surpassed the lack of accessible and affordable housing as the primary barrier to transitioning people out of nursing facilities back into the community (which is the work of CIDNY's Open Doors program). The State has an obligation under the Supreme Court decision, *Olmstead v. L.C.*, to provide people with support and services in the community. Unfortunately, the lack of available home care is forcing people who want to leave to remain in institutions. We acknowledge and appreciate the \$three increase included in the previous State budget, but know that it will not adequately address the ongoing home care crisis.

Full Fair Pay for Home Care would raise wages for home care workers and consumer-directed personal assistants to \$22.50/hr., or 150% of the highest minimum wage:

CIDNY supports Home Care Restoration Act (S2540, Rivera/A2556, Hawley.)

This bill repeals managed long term care provisions for Medicaid recipients, and establishes provisions for fully integrated plans for long term care including PACE and MAP plans. The purpose of this bill is to eliminate the current partially capitated Medicaid Long Term Care program and replace it with long term care services delivered through a fee-for-service model while preserving fully capitated models.

CIDNY supports Local Input in Community Healthcare (LICH) Act S1226.

This bill requires public notice and public engagement when a general hospital seeks to close entirely or a unit that provides maternity, mental health or substance use care.

CIDNY supports allowing New Yorkers to access asthma inhalers at no cost (S1804, Rivera/A128, Addabbo).

This bill would require insurance coverage for asthma inhalers at no cost, no co-pays, no deductibles, and no cost sharing).

CIDNY supports increasing short-term disability benefits (S172 Ramos/A84, Solages).

This bill provides increases to the Temporary Disability Insurance Benefits and expands coverage for individuals.

CIDNY supports creating New York Funded Statewide Deafblind Co-Navigator Program (S3743, Cleare).

This bill establishes a co-navigation services program for persons who are deaf-blind, to provide assistive services to physically access the person's environment and to make informed decisions. It includes providing visual and environmental information or sighted guide services and assisting with communication accessibility by communicating in the preferred language and communication mode of the person who is deaf-blind.

CIDNY supports Guarantee equity in the Medicaid program by increasing and then eliminating the asset test (A1043, Kim)

An act to amend the Social Services Law, in relation to increasing the amount of the savings exemption for eligibility for Medicaid and eliminating the asset test for some individuals; and to repeal certain provisions of such law relating thereto.

CIDNY supports Andre's Law (S937, Brisport).

This bill prohibits the use of aversive conditioning, including any procedure which causes obvious signs of physical pain, including, but not limited to hitting, pinching and electric shock; and prohibits the use of any procedure or punishment which denies a vulnerable person reasonable sleep, shelter, bedding, bathroom facilities and any other aspect expected of a humane existence.

CIDNY supports NYS Health Act (A1466, Paulin)

This bill establishes the New York Health program, a comprehensive system of access to health insurance for all New York State residents. This may include primary, preventive and specialty care; hospitalization; mental health; substance use treatment; reproductive health; dental, vision and hearing and long-term care.

CIDNY opposes “Single Fiscal Intermediary” in CDPAP:

CIDNY strongly opposes the Single Fiscal Intermediary that Governor Hochul is implementing. Our opposition is based on:

- **Limited Consumer Choice:** Limiting CDPAP to a single fiscal intermediary (FI) removes the consumers’ freedom to choose providers that best meet their needs. Different FIs offer varying levels of service, flexibility, and customer support, which are crucial for consumers who manage their own care.
- **Monopolizing CDPAP:** A single FI creates a monopoly, reducing competition and potentially leading to decreased quality of service over time.
- **Eliminating Local Businesses:** Many FIs are local organizations that provide jobs and services within communities. Eliminating competition could harm local economies and reduce employment opportunities.

CIDNY supports the following initiatives from the Mental Health Association in NYS:

- **Mental Health and Not-for-Profit Workforce Funding**, which will provide a 7.8% increase for community-based not-for-profits’ human services rates and contracts in the FY 2025-26 NYS Budget. This increase will address both inflationary increase and a cost-of-living adjustment.
- **Building the Mental Health Workforce**, to address the mental health worker shortage experienced by the 39 counties in NYS currently designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas.
- **Mental Health Literacy and Whole Health Parity Legislation**, to address the growing mental health crisis on college campuses.
- **Mental Health Literacy of Students and School Community**, to address the growing mental health crisis among school-aged children by ensuring that teachers and school staff receive training in mental health literacy, that mental health absences are considered excused absences, and that schools have policies to address suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.
- **Increased Funding for Supportive Housing, including Community Mental Health and Access to Care**, to support the 40,000 New Yorkers who rely on supportive housing to live independently in their communities.

This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director for CIDNY.

Sincerely,

Mbacke Thiam, He/Him/His

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