



# *Testimony*

to the  
**Senate Finance Committee and  
Assembly Ways and Means Committee on the  
Proposed 2025-26 Executive Budget for  
Human Services**

**February 12, 2025**

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*Representing nearly 700,000 professionals in education and health care*  
*Affiliated with the AFT – NEA – AFL-CIO*

*Testimony of  
Melinda Person,  
President  
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to the  
Senate Finance Committee  
Liz Krueger, Chair  
and  
Assembly Ways and Means Committee  
J. Gary Pretlow, Chair  
on the  
Proposed 2024-25 Executive Budget for  
Human Services  
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Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Pretlow, honorable members of the Legislature and distinguished staff, I am Melinda Person, President of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). NYSUT represents nearly 700,000 teachers, school-related professionals, academic and professional faculty and staff in higher education, professionals in education, in human services agencies, in healthcare and retirees statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the proposed 2025-26 New York State Executive Budget for Human Services.

The executive budget includes a 2.1 percent inflationary increase, which includes a COLA for human service providers who contract with a variety of state agencies to care for New Yorkers. NYSUT represents several ARCs and other human service provider staff across the state and joins other organizations calling for a 7.8 percent COLA for those who work in these agencies.

To maintain the quality of care in these specialized settings, we must address the critical issue of staff recruitment and retention. NYSUT calls on the Legislature to create and allocate \$40 million to a new Direct Care Support Turnover Grant program.

I have visited direct care facilities and met with direct support professionals (DSPs). I have seen firsthand the enormity of their responsibilities as advocates for people who may be unable to communicate their needs. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers rely on DSPs to ensure their loved ones are well taken care of in their absence. I have also witnessed the unique emotional and physical demands of their job that extend beyond basic care as they strive to provide a high quality of life for the individuals they support. From placing feeding tubes to deescalating high-stress situations, DSPs are often performing tasks typically associated with higher-paying professional fields.

Yet, despite their invaluable roles on the frontline of specialized care, staff tell me that some have gone two decades without an appreciable pay increase. Others say they are quitting to take jobs in the fast-food industry, because the pay is better.

I cannot stress enough that these dedicated workers are integral to serving our most vulnerable populations with compassion and dignity. They work intensively to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) — assisting with essential daily tasks like dressing, bathing, housekeeping and preparing food; helping with community integration through job placements and social engagements; administering medication; providing companionship; and empowering them to live independently.

In short, DSPs are everyday heroes helping people with IDD live their lives to the fullest. It is critical to fairly compensate these workers who are lifting up our shared humanity.

They should not be paid so little that they are forced to choose between supporting the people they serve at work or their families at home. Years without competitive wages have caused a workforce crisis and high turnover rates.

New York must fulfill its constitutional obligation to support people with IDD, and that starts by compensating direct support professionals appropriately.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to submit my testimony to you today.