

February 25, 2014

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Senate Democratic Conference Leader
Legislative Office Building Room 907
188 State Street
Albany NY 14227

Dear Senate Leader Stewart-Cousins:

Last year, the Senate Democratic Conference was a strong supporter of efforts to restore funding for supports and services to people with developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, again this year, the Executive Budget has failed to provide the level of resources necessary to allow individuals with developmental disabilities to receive services in integrated settings consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Olmstead mandate.

In addition, the Executive budget fails to recognize the role of direct support professionals (DSPs) and fails to invest resources to support the work of DSPs. Research and experience prove that a well-trained and compensated workforce improves the lives of the people being served.

I have been hearing from the parents, families, and individuals with developmental disabilities, as well as many of the dedicated direct care staff who serve them, that additional funds are needed in order to allow people with developmental disabilities to live integrated lives in the community.

The Executive budget proposal seeks to address individuals being served in an institutional setting but fails to include funding or resources for the thousands of individuals with disabilities living at home with aging caretakers currently identified as needing supports and services who are seeking to live more integrated lives. More needs to be done to meet our responsibilities under Olmstead.

The Executive Budget proposal fails to provide any funding to enhance the extremely low compensation DSPs currently receive or build opportunities for career advancement, making it exceedingly difficult to recruit and retain the talented individuals necessary to provide high quality services.

I would ask that the Senate one-house budget bill include enhanced funding for these purposes as the first step to ensuring that additional funding for the development of day, employment and out-of-home residential opportunities and funds to increase the wages of the dedicated direct care staff is part of the final enacted budget this year.

As part of the ongoing budget process, I would urge the Senate Democratic conference to advocate for the use of the resources identified in negotiations with the Assembly and the Governor, including revenues identified by the Senate Minority Finance Committee Revenue and Fiscal Outlook, consensus spending re-estimates and rejections of new spending initiatives proposed by the Executive and other available resources, to invest in our most vulnerable citizens.

Very truly yours,

Member of the Senate

cc: Joseph F. Pennisi