Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

June 30, 2021

Re: Fiscal Year 2022 State Budget. There is a Break in the Rain

Dear Members, Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of ABCD which represents providers of community services for individuals with developmental disabilities at every stage of life and at every level of independence, we would like to express our appreciation to Governor Murphy and members of the New Jersey Legislature for the expansion of investment and services to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the Fiscal Year 2022 State Budget.

Once again in a bipartisan manner, New Jersey’s leaders remain steadfast in their determination that we will all get through this together, valuing both the individuals that we serve and the people who serve them.

- Beginning on January 1, 2022, $42 million in State dollars will be allocated to support a wage increase for front line staff who took enormous risks and often worked without protective gear while continuing to provide compassionate and quality care, and for supervisors and managers who handled the pandemic crisis with confidence and steadiness, projecting hope and strength while at times filling in when needed for direct care staff. We will continue to advocate to ensure that all staff receive a living wage and a salary commensurate with the value, care, and professionalism they provide.

- Ensuring that the necessary resources are available through the end of the calendar year to residential providers caring 24/7 for up to 8000 individuals sheltering in place at a cost of $57 million in State dollars.

- Increasing the Early Intervention provider rate by $10 million in State dollars to prevent the erosion of therapeutic services, that change the life trajectory of infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. Early Intervention providers, because they effectively had not had a rate increase for 16 years, have been unable to compete with the salary levels offered by hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, rehabilitation facilities and 573 public school districts for licensed professional therapists many of whom are hired on a full-time basis vs. the predominantly part-time practice in the early intervention system.
• Increasing the Day Program rate for day habilitation, career planning, community inclusion services, group prevocational training and group support employment by $25 million in State dollars starting on October 1, 2021. This includes the $10 million in State dollars (5%) Absenteeism Factor in the day program rate, originally proposed in the FY’21 Budget which was delayed due to the immediate need for additional resources to combat the pandemic. Day program rates have been under-resourced since the inception of the Fee for Service system in 2014. The continued exclusion of certain factors, such as absence, nursing, and transportation in the calculation of the day program rates left our programs particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of the current labor market; some re-opened day programs are having to restrict services to individuals simply because they do not have enough staff. We will work to ensure that this increase is annualized.

• An additional $2.5 million in State dollars for day habilitation. Since there is no language attached to the funds, we hope they will be used to ensure services for individuals with high medical and psychiatric needs to prevent their possible discharge and institutionalization, as we had advocated for. During FY’22 Budget Hearings, Acting Commission Adelman stated that the division was going to look at support for absences, particularly for those with high medical needs, to ensure that their care does not negatively impact providers who focus on this population. Considering this, ABCD’s Day Program Committee will review internal data to provide the division with a definition of chronic absenteeism and the cost of providing their care.

• An additional $400,000 in State dollars to raise the rate for Supportive Employment services to not less than $63 per hour.

We celebrate these important and hard-won advances and look forward to continuing to address in the FY 2023 budget cycle:

• Ensuring that the FY’22 rate increases are annualized for Early Intervention and Day Programs.

• An increase to the Support Coordination rate to match the educational level required by the state. The foundation for managing, administering, and overseeing the life-long support needs of the adult individual with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in the community is Support Coordination. This job was initially required to have a high school diploma, but the state correctly changed this requirement to a bachelor’s degree in a related field ensuring that the Support Coordinator is committed to a career in human services and signaling that they possess the necessary perseverance and self-direction, management skills and maturity to do the job. However, the State has never changed the rate to reflect this heightened educational requirement. On July 1, 2021, and with the FY’23 Budget in mind, the Support Coordination Alliance of ABCD will commence meetings with legislators to educate them on the role and importance of Support Coordination in our person-centered system of care.
• Annual indexing of all rates paid by the Department of Human Services/Division of Developmental Disabilities which includes Support Coordination, Supports Program, Community Care Program, and all remaining contracts. 2008 dollars paying for overhead and operational costs in 2021 has taken a great toll on our organizations’ immediate and future financial health. The consequences of targeted, albeit necessary wage increases have caused other staff to demand increases like their colleagues and threaten resignation. If left unchecked, the potential drain of our talent pool through employee attrition will have negative long-term consequences on our agencies and their provision of services. The State must consider an annual rate increase for community providers’ which will cover all costs.

We appreciate the collective commitment of the Governor, Administration, Legislature, and our community to continue to support individuals with developmental disabilities as they achieve their dreams of dignity, opportunity, and a full life in the community.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

Sincerely,

Cathy Chin
Executive Director