



150 West 30<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10001

(212) 645-6360 / Fax (212) 627-8847

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Testimony  
for the  
Public Hearing  
of the  
New York State Assembly  
Standing Committee  
On Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities

on  
**The Adequacy of Supports and Services  
for Individuals  
with Developmental Disabilities**

Delivered by:  
**Winifred Schiff**  
Associate Executive Director  
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On behalf of IAC and our members, I thank Assemblymember Gunther and the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, for holding today's hearing and allowing us to present our views on The Adequacy of Supports and Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities.

The InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc. (IAC) is a membership organization of more than 150 voluntary not-for-profit providers of services to individuals with developmental disabilities, and their families, in the New York City metropolitan region, along with associate members in other parts of the state. Our membership operates early intervention services, preschools, school-age programs, residences, clinics, adult day and employment programs, and family support programs with a daily capacity of over 100,000.

While we have suggestions for improvements in various areas of service delivery, today's comments will focus on three specific areas, residential development, the effect of increasing minimum wage on our ability to attract and retain qualified staff, and the cost of administering managed care on the developmental disabilities service system.

### **Residential Development;**

The lack of availability of out of home residential services is of paramount concern to many families. Many converging influences have led to the current situation where there are people in crisis waiting for services across the State. Cuts to the system over the last 5 years, including the massive reduction in federal funds in 2013, the increasing numbers of people in need including the aging and autism populations, and various policy initiatives, have combined to create a shortage of needed options. OPWDD previously estimated that over 3800 people are in dire need of residential services, especially those living with aging parents and families with adult children whose behaviors simply cannot be managed safely at home. Recent efforts to update the residential "registration list" will hopefully provide accurate information, but whatever the number, **we propose that half of all certified residential opportunities developed be reserved for those currently living at home with families.** While the State has prioritized residential supports for those currently living in institutional settings, people waiting at home with their families in the community have been largely ignored. For people whose needs are less intense, non-certified residential options are a good choice. But with few affordable housing opportunities available, this option will rarely become a reality. **We urge the Governor to include funds in the next state budget targeted for affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities who require less costly non-certified residential options.**

### **The Cost of Managed Care Administration and Overhead:**

The transformation of our service delivery system from fee for service to managed care, may result in efficiencies that will enable our growing population to receive the life-sustaining services they require - but not if savings are used to pay for administration of the system itself. Over the last 35 years, New York State's service system for people with developmental disabilities and their families has achieved national and even world-wide recognition. Over 130,000 individuals and their families rely on these services every day to live the kind of lives that you and I take for granted. It is our responsibility to build on the foundation of excellence we have created for these New Yorkers.

In the current system, services are funded and delivered through different state agencies including OPWDD, DOH, OMH and others. In this cumbersome system, eligibility and documentation requirements vary greatly and gaps in service due to the time it takes to determine eligibility for various services are common. Moving away from this “silo” approach and toward an integrated managed care environment holds the promise of enabling a single port of entry and the seamless coordination of services as needs emerge. The savings in time, money and improvement in service delivery for service recipients make managed care appear to be an attractive alternative to the current system. Coordinated care can reduce the frequency and duration of psychiatric hospitalizations and reduce unnecessary visits to the emergency room. Coordination of nutrition, dental, podiatry and other services can result in better outcomes and savings overall. With a shrinking pool of available dollars and a growing population due to a number of factors including increased diagnoses and longevity of people in the system, **the administration and overhead of the managed care bureaucracy MUST NOT be covered by funds currently used for services to people. Funds saved through the managed care service delivery model MUST be utilized for currently unserved or underserved people. The cost of managed care administration is well documented. The Governor’s budget proposal should include new funds specifically for this purpose.**

#### **Increasing the Minimum Wage:**

Hard working New Yorkers deserve a living wage. Too many people across the state still qualify for public assistance despite working full time and increasing the minimum wage is fiscally prudent as those dollars are pumped directly back into the economy. We fully support the Governor’s initiative to raise the minimum wage for food service workers and for all people earning less than \$15 per hour...but what about those earning just above minimum wage whose jobs require judgement, skill, training and expertise? Workers in our residential, day and education programs are required to receive extensive training and work in a highly accountable, closely scrutinized environment. In fact, requirements for these workers are increasing due to OPWDD’s transformation agenda and our move toward more community based, integrated services. Because it is necessary to protect the vulnerable people we serve, our employees are subject to background checks and serious consequences for lapses in care. Despite the required level of expertise, our staff members are often compensated at or slightly above minimum wage.

Neither Medicaid nor State Education Department funds support a higher rate of pay for these essential employees so in order **to increase pay to our workers we will need additional funds from the State. And in addition to increasing the minimum wage, we need to consider those who have made careers improving the lives of others who are currently earning more than the entry-level rate. When the minimum is raised for new workers, current workers with experience and greater expertise should be compensated at a commensurate level and agencies providing services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities will need additional funding in the State Budget to cover increases for these valuable employees as well.** IAC members are already finding it difficult to attract and retain workers for jobs that are rewarding but highly physically and emotionally demanding- these are not and should not be minimum wage jobs. An increase that leaves our workers behind will cause more of our employees to seek employment elsewhere and make it difficult to maintain the health and safety of the people in our programs.

In conclusion, New York should provide people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families with the high quality services they need to live the kinds of lives others take for granted. We implore the Governor to include funds in his budget proposal to increase the supply of affordable housing for this group, cover the cost of the administration and overhead of managed care and to enable direct support professionals, who are the backbone of our service delivery system to earn wages that match the important work they do.

Contact: Winifred Schiff  
917-750-1497 c  
212-645-6360 o  
[wini@iacny.org](mailto:wini@iacny.org)