



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Assembly Budget Committee

Testimony on the Proposed FY'24 Budget

March 27, 2023

Good day, Chairperson Pintor Marin and members of the Assembly Budget Committee. On behalf of ABCD, thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts as you begin deliberations on the proposed FY '24 Budget. It means a lot to us to be a part of your process.

Over the last number of years, The Murphy Administration and this Legislature broke with tradition and provided our sector with leadership and support by repairing our day service rates to include costs that were not in the original formula, rehabilitating the early intervention rate after a decade and a half of deterioration, and upgrading the wages we pay to our DSPs and supervisors. Consequently, now is an opportunity to create lasting reform.

Invest in People and Agencies

\$36 million in State dollars for DDD community providers and \$41.7 million in State dollars for an annual DSP/Supervisor increase, included in the proposed budget.

Since the history of IDD in the community has yet to be enacted, ABCD providers are tasked with preventing and minimizing permanent disability, insuring that people on both sides of the disabled divide can thrive in the same place and building a better system that stands up for human rights. Unfortunately, our inelastic Medicaid payment system means we cannot promptly respond to inflation, changes in supply and demand for services we purchase and provide or make course corrections when an unanticipated need emerges. As you know, it is not only economic but political fluctuations that determine whether a person's direct care worker or the agencies janitorial staff receive a living wage, nurse receives a competitive wage, the use of the wheelchair accessible vehicle is extended for yet another year, and their resources are adequate for them to thrive in the community. If we believe that as citizens, individuals with IDD must possess the means necessary to take advantage of opportunities and exercise their rights then we must commit to minimizing their exposure to the vagaries of the economic or political scenes by enacting annualized investment increases.

Please support the proposed 3% across the board COLA increase for DDD community providers in addition to the annual wage increase for DSPs and Supervisors. If funds permit, please consider an additional 2.5% increase to the COLA.

Support Housing Options

\$5 million in State only dollars, included in proposed budget.

Housing costs are supported for individuals with IDD by Division rental subsidies which are currently capped at 75% of the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for 2017. This combined with the notoriously lagging federal FMR makes it increasingly difficult to find and maintain rentals for licensed sites. We ask for your support of the administration's recommendation for a 10% increase to the current capped rates so that we may keep pace with market increases.

Bolster Quality

\$4.5 million in State dollars, included in the proposed budget.

In FY'22 the Department took a prudent course of action when it elected to use one-time dollars to raise the Support Coordination rate through March 2024, to match the educational requirement. In an ABCD survey on the preliminary impact of this time-limited rate increase we found that we are on a trajectory of improved quality. If we do not wish to revert to a weaker system, please support the proposed annualized increase for what is effectively the foundation of our person-centered, strength-based system of care.

Ease Suffering

\$5 million for emergency capacity bed redevelopment and \$3.2 million for START regional response teams which provide community-based crisis intervention, included in the proposed budget.

The mental health needs of the underserved IDD population continue to receive increased resources from the department for which we are very grateful. Please support the administration's proposal to strengthen crisis beds and services.

Invest in Children

7.5 % Increase (approximately \$11 million in state dollars) for DOH early intervention providers.

We are thrilled to report that on March 24, 2023, DOH Commissioner Judith Persichilli announced that Early Intervention would receive a 7.5% increase in the FY'24 Budget. Committing to provide us with resources to decrease our waiting list by helping us compete with hospitals, nursing homes and schools for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech language pathologists to provide rehabilitation services to the infants and toddlers we serve with developmental disabilities and delays. We respectfully request that you support the inclusion of this increase in the FY'24 Budget to help us continue to take on one of society's most important endeavors, preventing and minimizing permanent disability.

We ask for a lot of "stuff." But you give us no reason to narrow our aspirations, indeed, we only see opportunity.