



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Department of Health FY 2025 Budget Listening Session

November 14, 2023

Good day, Acting Commissioner Baston, and members of the Department of Health. On behalf of ABCD, thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts as you begin deliberations on the proposed FY '25 Budget. It means a lot to us to be a part of your process.

Over the last number of years, the Murphy Administration and the Department of Health broke with tradition and provided our sector with leadership and support by affording our providers with rate increases for the first time in over a decade and a half ¹ - proving that “things do not have to be the way they are.” ²

Continued Investment in Infants and Toddlers

EI provider agencies take on one of society's most important endeavors, minimizing and preventing permanent disability. But their ability to fulfill their mission is jeopardized whenever we fail to recognize that they are rate takers not makers, forced to make do until the inconsistent intervention of government. As in any business, our agency executives provide strategic and operational leadership, manage services, and support and guide employees. Unfortunately, our in-elastic rate system means we cannot always promptly respond to inflation or make course corrections when an unanticipated need emerges.

The pandemic is a case in point. Inadequate state funding for over a decade led to shortages of EI practitioners and a lack of reserves to respond effectively during the crisis --- many opportunities for therapeutic interventions during the pandemic may have been needlessly interrupted, ended, or unbegun.

The increases begun in 2021 are helping to reverse this trend. A recent survey of ABCD's EIPA members found that the rate increases enabled them to retain most staff and, for many, begin hiring replacement workers, including more experienced practitioners. Average turnover rates since 2021 are 23% versus 10% for years prior. In part, this is a result of the pandemic -- practitioners are reassessing the field, some choosing more constancy - a job in one setting without travel and unpredictable wages due to cancellations or simply fewer work hours. On a positive note, our members report that there are professionals entering the field as their sole

¹ Early Intervention providers received an increase of 5% on July 1, 2021, 2.5% on January 1, 2022, and 7.5% on July 1, 2023.

² Grant Neufeld medium.com

income source, their career. “Everyone is happier. They no longer feel under paid and feel they are valued.” Truth be told, we may be in a transitional period. Though the number of children waiting for service is still well above pre—Covid levels, since and due to the rate increase on July 1, 2023, and the efforts of the state and community at large, the standby list has been reduced by 55% in just four months’ time.³ But staffing pressures continue to force many EIPA members to slow their growth despite increased demand and need for services especially in low-income and underserved communities. In addition to growing our workforce and finding new ways for care to be accessed, we need to ensure that we are maximizing utilization and minimizing overutilization of our current workforce.

Government’s recent actions to supply us with resources to provide high quality service, and increase and expand our work with infants, toddlers, and their families must be an enduring commitment. As you know, the human cost to infants and toddlers who do not receive timely and exceptional service is tremendous, the cost to the public purse substantial. Please consider an annual rate increase for EI providers of 7.5% in the FY’25 Budget

Thank you for your partnership helping us do the most meaningful job, which is an incredibly good job.

³ 1605 as of June 30, 2023 and 728 as of November 13, 2023.