



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

New Jersey Disability Legislative Caucus Welcomes the 221st New Jersey Legislature Member Introductions and Advocacy Successes February 20, 2024

Chairpersons Ruiz, Bucco, Dunn and Greenwald, members of the NJ Legislature, NJ Disability Legislative Caucus, Director Witowsky, and the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities, thank you for this opportunity to share some the important work of the caucus.

The Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities (ABCD) is an alliance of community providers in NJ devoted to improving the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In addition to the provision of day and residential programs and services for adults, our member agencies provide early intervention services – physical, occupational and speech language therapies to infants and toddlers, birth to three, with developmental delays or disabilities. The goal of this intervention is simply to minimize and prevent permanent disability.

As this program is administered by the Department of Health it was easily overshadowed by hospitals and nursing homes. Because of the many years effort by the NJ Legislature, Administration, Council, Caucus, and others, for the first time in over a decade and a half Early Intervention received a rate increase and continues to receive more attention and resources by the state. Resources which we have used to help bolster our workforce of licensed rehabilitation therapists who we compete to employ with hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and clinics.

17,000 infants and toddlers were served last year by the Early Intervention system in NJ, thousands more than in years past. But to the extent the recent audit by the State of New York on their Early Intervention System is indicative of New Jersey's, "many children are not receiving services, and children who are receiving them aren't always getting them in a timely manner."¹ We need to double our efforts to improve access, especially in low-income and

¹ Office of the NY State Comptroller. February 2023. *Department of Health. Oversight of the Early Intervention Program*. Report 2021 S 25. Key Findings. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/state-agencies/audits/pdf/sga-2023-21s25.pdf>

underserved communities.² In this regard, we are thrilled to be working with Advocates for Children in New Jersey on their new program, Unlocking Potential Part II or “UP” the goal of which is that by 2027 100% of families with children prenatal to age 3 that live in 5 designated historically underserved communities will be connected to resources they want and need so their families can thrive.

The human cost to infants and toddlers who do not receive timely and exceptional early intervention service is tremendous, the cost to the public purse substantial.³ The commitment to our children and their families must be enduring.

² National Institute for Early Education Research. Rutgers Graduate School of Education 2023. *The State(s) of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education. Looking at Equity.* https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SE_FullReport.pdf

³ Prenatal to 3; Policy Impact Center. 2023. *Early Intervention Services.* <https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2023/us/early-intervention/#:~:text=E1%20Services%20Can%20Save%20States,million%20depending%20on%20the%20state.>