



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee/Assembly Budget Committee

Testimony on the Proposed FY'25 Budget

March 11 and 19, 2024

Good day, Chairperson Sarlo and Members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee/ 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 '25 Budget. It means a lot to us to be a part of your process.

Our thanks to the Governor whose proposals will keep us moving forward and on track, despite the resource challenges by annualizing the January 2024, wage increases for DSPs and supervisors, enhancing training for DSPs, expanding NJ WorkAbility and income limits to PAAD and Senior Gold, ensuring a monthly minimum and enhancing security in SNAP, incentivizing the creation of ADUs, and ensuring that the professional licensing processes are completed in a timely manner.

However, the pathbreaking policies over the last few years of this Legislature and Administration must not become an anomaly.

Prevent Marginalization of Adults with IDD
Access to Habilitative Therapies
PT, OT, ST, DDD/DHS
\$2.1M State Share

Despite 75% of our programs reporting that physical, occupational and speech language therapies are desired and needed to help individuals to attain, keep, and improve skills and functioning, only 12.5% can offer them because of the rates which have made attempts to provide clinical services prohibitive. ¹ An ABCD petition signed by 1048 individuals, parents, and guardians support an increase which amounts to less than \$2.1M in state dollars, to make the DDD reimbursement competitive with market rates for these professions (for which a doctorate is required or will soon be required). These changes will alleviate the need for higher cost medical and rehabilitative services particularly for our aging population. When reimbursement is not based on existing standards, rates are meaningless and inadvertently perpetuate IDD's marginalization. Please give these individuals a better shot at living independently and expanding opportunities.

¹ ABCD White Paper. *Clinical Services and Day Habilitation*. August 2023. www.abcdnj.org

Prevent a De Facto Rate Reduction for All DDD Community Providers
Deliver on the Expectations of the IDD Community and the Public at Large.
DDD Community Providers/DDD
\$39.3M State Share

Despite last year's unprecedented across the board increase of 3.25%, there is no sign of negative inflation to counter last year's whopping 8.7% inflation rate. As a result, we need assistance to catch up with the costs 2023 left in its wake. For this reason, we ask for consideration of an across-the-board inflationary increase of 3%. This policy is the next step to better enable agency executives to provide strategic and operational leadership, manage services and support and guide employees. Please consider preventing what is effectively an across-the-board rate reduction for all DDD community services in FY'25.

Prevent and Minimize Permanent Disability
Infants and Toddlers, Birth to Three
Early Intervention, DOH
\$4.5M State Share

The last years' increases to Ealy Intervention helped agencies to provided life altering therapy, to 17,000 disabled and developmentally delayed infants and toddlers last year (thousands more than in years past) and reduced the standby list by 73% in just seven months.² Despite increased demand overall and need for services in low-income and underserved communities,³ staffing pressures to employ licensed rehabilitation therapists, a national problem, forces agencies to slow their growth. Please help us to continue the positive trend that you began and prevent a de facto cutback by the inclusion of a 3% inflationary increase for EI providers.

The culture of poverty in our social service organizations must not be an acceptable norm. Our rates must not inadvertently perpetuate IDD's marginalization, our executives must have the resources to lead and deliver, and the future potential of our infants and toddlers must be maximized no matter the numbers in their zip code or their family's bank account.

² 1605 as of June 30, 2023, and 432 as of February 9, 2024.

³ 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