*OPWDD*

*Attn: Communications Office*

*44 Holland Avenue, 3rd Floor*

*Albany, NY 12229*

**TO: Commissioner Theodore Kastner**

**RE: Statewide Comprehensive 5.07 Plan**

Commissioner Kastner,

I am writing today to highlight what I feel are just four of the many critical long term supports and services issues that require stakeholder input on OPWDD’s strategic priorities as well as the use of funds from the American Rescue Plan in the development of the agency’s 5-year Statewide Comprehensive Plan. These are just a few of my biggest concerns:

1. **Direct Support Professionals** are critical to the structure and sustainability of all Long Term Supports and Services. OPWDD must prioritize and allocate FMAP funds to;
2. pay a fair wage to DSPs
3. offer improved benefits, including leave, hazard, bonus, overtime or other monetary benefits.
4. Provide funding for agencies and Fiscal Intermediaries to recruit qualified candidates.
5. **CCO/HH Care Managers** are the glue that hold critical aspects of OPWDD waiver services and supports together. Without well trained, comprehensive care management our most vulnerable will be at risk. OPWDD must continue to support and fund the CCO/HH model for people with I/DD
6. **Residential opportunities** of all types are essential to the long-term service model that upholds the promise of Willow Brook. It is unrealistic to expect aging families and overwhelmed siblings to care for individuals with often complex and challenging needs. OPWDD must work collaboratively with stakeholders to expand residential options that are person centered, community based and supported.
7. **Self-directed services** must be expanded to resolve the current service gaps that make the program unsustainable for people with I/DD. At its core, a reimbursement model is discriminatory for those without the financial resources to fund the SDS plan. Additionally, OPWDD must develop an ombudsmen role that can serve as a program facilitator when a family member is not available to participate in that capacity. Without these changes, true budget authority is unattainable and undermines the SDS program model.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback. I feel that these issues are critical to the sustainability of the LTSS delivery system and deserve your full attention as well as the additional funding from the 2021 FMAP resources provided to OPWDD through the American Rescue Plan.

Sincerely,