

October 21, 2021

RE: NYS Direct Care Workforce Crisis

Governor Hochul,

We are members of the LIFEPlan Member and Family Advisory Council who serve on an Advocacy Committee. Today we are writing on behalf of all individuals with developmental disabilities who receive Care Management services from the CCO/HH delivery system.

Many of us have already written, testified, and taken action via various state-wide campaigns to advocate for a *living wage* for direct care professionals. In addition, we have met with Senator John Mannion as well as Assemblymen Tom Abinanti on this urgent issue.

The current crisis in the workforce with incredibly high staff vacancy rates has compromised the health, safety, and basic rights of our most vulnerable citizens to access employment, day habilitation, residential supports, and community-based programs. The negative impact on individuals and families is tremendous and unacceptable.

We want you to hear some of their stories.

- **Jackie S:** *Most of my son's programs and services have not been able to start up because the agency that provided them cannot find enough DSPs. He is home almost all the time. His friend who lives in a group home is forced to stay there because the agency cannot find staff to take her into the community. **This is a crisis.** The state needs to act immediately to raise reimbursement rates so that DSPs can be paid a living wage, commensurate with the difficult and essential work they do.*
- **Minh N:** *We are a multi-generational family with an adult male sibling on the spectrum who has become very aggressive due to lack of services, especially day programming. We recently had to call the police and have him hospitalized when he attacked my elderly father and threw things at my young children. **The hospital would not admit him and there were no respite houses available due to staff shortages.** He has never been aggressive, but the lack of structure and routine has dramatically impacted him and our whole family.*
- **Kerry S:** *Our 32 year old daughter with autism and seizures still has some of her staff but without her day staff I have her about 75% of the time. **I was still working but now juggle that with my husband who is a full-time researcher and scientist.** I assume I have to just wait until the extra unemployment payments stop to be able to hire a new staff. This administration is in full blown denial of this fact when the signs are all around them.*
- **Mary S:** *We are down to 2 staff and 1 is out on medical leave. We have had 4 in the past. We have trouble hiring since the majority of the time they are alone in the house with my sister. **I have some supervision, but I also work full time.** Background checks only look at paper. Not character. It's hard to find trustworthy staff and be able to retain them at a decent pay rate.*
- **John W:** *At least 3 of our son's friends are **directly impacted by the DSP shortage.** One lives with parents whose day hab workers were transferred to residential positions or finding other employment. Another friend lives in an apartment but has lost job time. Another lives in a residential house and spends most of his time there after being employed regularly for years.*

These are just a handful of the stories shared with us about the hardship endured. There are many more. People are suffering, including self-advocate BJ Stasio who has had to sleep in his motorized wheelchair for over two years because he cannot find homecare. BJ has collaborated with The ARC of NY to [collect 10,000 letters](#) from individuals with disabilities and their families whose lives have been dramatically impacted by the direct care workforce crisis. Our Member and Family Advisory Council members support and applaud BJ's efforts.

Governor Hochul, this issue is a crisis across our state and requires your immediate attention.

The lack of DSP's either directly or indirectly effects and endangers every single individual in the OPWDD waiver system and must be addressed immediately, not next winter when the budget process begins in NYS.

We urge you to consider the gravity of the situation and look forward to receiving a response that we can share with our 19,000 members with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,

Tara Klein, Member Relations Manager, and parent of a LIFEPlan member
Jackie Sauter, Advocacy Committee Chair, and parent of a LIFEPlan member

LIFEPlan Family and Member Advisory Council, 2021 Advocacy Committee:

Sandi Rosenbaum, parent of a LIFEPlan member

Tina Fitzgerald, LIFEPlan member

Amy Watkins, parent of a LIFEPlan member

Mary Schwanke, sister of a LIFEPlan member

JP Wanamaker, parent of a LIFEPlan member

Lori Lemke, MFA Liaison and parent of a LIFEPlan member

Sent via email

CC: Nick Cappoletti, Chief Executive Officer
LIFEPlan CCO NY