

# SWAN of NYS

## Statewide Advocacy Network– New York

We add our support to the many voices calling for appropriate funding and wage increases in the 2017-18 NYS Budget for the dedicated Direct Support Professionals who work with our loved ones, people with IDD.

In these Transformational times NYS wants to provide a wide range of Individualized and Community based services. Are we going to develop a large number of certified residences or simply concentrate on alternative residential supports? Can we successfully transition our sheltered workshop workforce to competitive employment? Will Self-Direction redefine the service system? Regardless of the answers to these or any of the myriad other issues that we are facing one truth stands out. If we do not have a stable, professional workforce none of these other questions matter.

The bFair2DirectCare coalition highlights the vacancy rate and the turnover that providers are dealing with. Though these statistics may be disconcerting, for our loved ones staff vacancies and turnover are personal. Vacancies means broken promises of services that are approved but not delivered. Vacancies mean activities have to be cancelled. Turnover isn't just losing staff. Turnover is losing friends.

We ask an enormous amount from DSPs, from accompanying individuals in the community, administering medication at the right times and in the right doses, following eating protocols, assisting in activities of daily living for many different people, day after day after day. We also ask that DSPs understand and are responsive to people's emotional needs. Direct Support Professionals are trained to deal with challenging behaviors and non-verbal people. Everything they do must be recorded and checked. DSPs are there when we can't be and they are family when family members are not around. This is not a job for just anyone, it takes dedication and caring. Mostly, though, being a DSP should not and cannot continue to be a minimum wage job.

Ten years ago average DSP wages in the not-for-profit agencies were approximately 50% higher than minimum wage. Today those same agencies are struggling to meet the NYS minimum wage mandates. bFairto2Directcare is asking for an increase in reimbursement of \$45Million each year for six years in order to reach a 'living wage' that is 18% higher than minimum wage in NYC and 24% higher than minimum wage in Upstate NY. While this may achieve a greater level of stability than we are currently experiencing, it falls very short of recognizing DSPs as the valued and skilled workers that they are. Of course this is not an issue for DSPs in the NYS workforce. Pointing out the disparity between the state and not-for-profit workers is rarely even part of the discussion. Still, for those of us lying awake at night wondering how our children will be cared for as we watch services degrade across the state, it's difficult to understand why this huge difference continues to exist.

Finally, we encourage the administration to address these issues today. Six years is an awfully long time to achieve such a modest outcome. For those of us in our sixties and seventies who still provide care for our children with Developmental Disabilities, six years seems like a lifetime and may very well prove to be one.

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