

Honorable Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
NYS State Capitol
Albany NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Congratulations on your reelection for a third term as Governor of the State of New York. Public service is honorable and we applaud those who serve.

We are writing as Board President and CEO for Northern Rivers Family of Services. Our organization serves 16,000 families, adults, and children in a twenty county region in the areas of education, mental health, and residential services to abused and neglected children. We want to also thank you for all of the leadership and advocacy you provide on a statewide and national basis for New York State's children and families! Your voice is powerful.

We need to raise a serious issue that impacts the ability of the nonprofit sector to make positive and long lasting impacts on our state's future.

As the economy has improved, recruiting and retaining front line, counseling, mental health and educational staff has become increasingly more difficult given the current starting and average salary levels our agency is able to pay. The competition for an adequate workforce has reached a crisis level.

A recent survey from 126 nonprofit organizations during a one week period in October 2018 showed high turnover and vacancy rates. Respondents reported on 14,500 positions in organizations that ranged from 4 employees to over 2000 employees. Findings included:

- Turnover Rates Spike to Over 40% in 2 Regions and Vacancy Rates to 20%
- The statewide average for turnover is 34% and the statewide vacancy rate the week of Oct 15-21, 2018 was 14%.

The impact of high turnover and unfilled positions is negative as reflected in:

- Less services to families and children in the areas of child care, child welfare, education, and mental health
- Disruptive services within communities due to turnover, program downsizing, and wait lists
- Higher cost to state and local government due to the impact of turnover including repeat hospital admissions, longer lengths of stay, delayed transitions to lower levels of care or return home and more
- Family impact and impacts of program service wait lists
- Staff burnout of current staff

We need to upgrade the quality of our staff; far too many of our child-care workers are high school graduates with little or no college education. As agencies try to implement complex, organized, and focused evidence-based, trauma-informed practices in an effort to improve outcomes, and our workers need education, knowledge, and expertise to use these tools effectively.

NORTHERNRIVERS

NORTHEAST PARENT & CHILD SOCIETY
PARSONS CHILD & FAMILY CENTER

Northern Rivers Family of Services is part of the Strong Nonprofits and united Mental Health Coalition that strongly supports inclusion in the SFY 2019–20 Executive Budget existing law without modification that provides for an annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for the human services workforce. This request mirrors the position of Strong Nonprofits (comprised of more than 300 human services agencies) who have likewise established COLA as their top priority in the 2019–20 Executive Budget.

The COLA was enacted as permanent statute in the FY 2006–07 Executive Budget. Unfortunately, in the past 12 years, the COLA was granted only one year. The COLA is based on the CPI index, which is currently at 2.9%. The delay of this modest annual payment has saved New York State over \$686 million since 2008.

Human services agencies face the same annual cost inflators—health and liability insurance, rising real estate costs, and staff salaries and benefits, to name just a few as their peer Medicaid agencies that benefit from cost-adjusted rates.

This funding will help provide a long overdue living wage for the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers working in the nonprofit sector, who are providing critical services to vulnerable New Yorkers.

We urge support in the executive budget for this year's human services 2.9% CPI COLA increase.

Again, Congratulations on your reelection. We look forward to working with you to support New York State's children and families.

Sincerely



Justin Priddle, Chair
Northern Rivers Board of Directors



William T. Gettman
Chief Executive Officer