

Dear Governor Hochul:

We are writing to you as members of the Justice Center Advisory Council regarding recommendations for the SFY 2022-2023 state budget. The Justice Center's Advisory Council membership includes service providers, people who have or are currently receiving services, their family members and advocates. More than half of the members are individuals, parents or relatives of individuals, who are receiving or have received services from programs under Justice Center jurisdiction. We are hopeful our recommendations are contained in the Executive Budget Proposal delivered in January.

First however, we want to extend our deep thanks and appreciation for your leadership and public service during one of the most challenging times facing our state. Your focus on supporting the delivery of safe and appropriate services to the most vulnerable children, youth and adults in the human services sector during these uncharted times is remarkable.

During the pandemic, NYS human services workers stayed on the job, provided great service, and cared for the most vulnerable. Due to both a robust and highly competitive economy that has increased private sector wages and insufficient reimbursement rates, nonprofits are now unable to attract and retain the quality staff that our vulnerable citizens deserve.

Now, we see a steady stream of workers leaving or not even applying for community-based human services jobs. The result is many jobs are going unfilled, leading to a staffing shortage that has reached emergency levels. The human services sector depends on trained staff to support our clients. We can't replace staff with technology nor can we raise our prices.

The low pay in the human services field is a major factor in the workforce crunch. Human services workers — most of whom are paid through contracts or rates established by and with the state government — represent 20 percent of our state's workforce and deliver services to more than 2.5 million New Yorkers. Nearly 80 percent of human services workers are women and more than half are people of color.

Yet compared to peers in the private sector, nonprofit human services workers are dramatically underpaid: while the average New Yorker earns \$67,500 annually, the average human services worker in New York earns only \$27,800. Many workers in the sector are forced to rely on the same public assistance programs as the clients they serve or a second or third job.

Nearly every sector in the state is experiencing labor shortages. But in these mainly nonprofit human services jobs, the effects are far-reaching. Workers are pulling double shifts to make up for staffing shortages. And with so many jobs going unfilled, vulnerable populations aren't always able to get the vital services they need.

If these conditions were not crisis level by themselves for the sector, we are also faced with inflation and supply chain impacts fueling large increases in basic supplies and operational supports. Some examples include 14% increases in food, 42% increase in fuel and major insurance cost increases.

Recommendation

Though promised an annual statutory Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) more than a decade ago by state lawmakers, the adjustment has been manually removed from the state spending package 9 out of the past 11 years. The state budget is the vehicle to meet the intent and requirements of the legislation.

We urge you to include the 5.4% CPI factor in your budget submission.

The strength of the state's nonprofit partners has always been the mission-driven, resilient, and caring response to need. Together, NYS's health and human services agencies and nonprofits have fought through economic challenges in the past. We believe with prudent and necessary investments in the FY 2022-2023 state budget, gains can be made in behalf of all New Yorkers.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



William T. Gettman, Chair
Northern Rivers

Norwig Debye-Saxinger, Therapeutic Communities Association

Denise Figueroa, Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley

Jeremy Klemanski, Helio Health

Glenn Liebman, Mental Health Association in New York State

Joseph Macbeth, National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

Thomas McAlvanah, Interagency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies

Delores Fraser McFadden, Behavioral Momentum Applied Behavior Analysis

Megan O'Connor-Hebert, Care Design NY

Judith O'Rourke, Parent

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