

January 31, 2020

The Honorable Phil Murphy
Governor, State of New Jersey
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy:

As parents of sons and daughters with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who rely on direct support professionals (DSPs) to live in communities across New Jersey, **we respectfully ask that you make our loved ones a funding priority in your budget and agenda to make New Jersey Stronger and Fairer.** We appreciate that you maintained funding in FY20 to slightly increase DSP wages, but significant state investment is needed to stabilize the worsening DSP workforce shortage that is threatening the safety and health of our sons and daughters in community-settings.

To us, a *Stronger and Fairer* New Jersey is one where we know our loved ones are safe and supported by quality, consistent direct support staff who enable them to live the fulfilling lives they deserve. Tragically, this is far from our reality.

The community-based, disability service system is in complete crisis with 44% turnover and nearly 30% vacancy rates because DSP wages fall far below the responsibility and skill required to do the job. At an average starting wage of just \$12 per hour, DSP wages are simply not competitive. And with an increasing number of retailers paying \$15-18 p/h, and New Jersey's minimum wage on a path to \$15 p/h for entry-level jobs that are far less demanding, it's only getting harder to hire and retain quality DSPs. Your immediate attention is needed to invest in the DSP workforce as the lives of our loved ones are literally on the line.

Raising New Jersey's minimum wage was the right thing to do, but DSPs are far from minimum wage workers. They cannot be left behind. In order to stay competitive and maintain a stable, quality DSP workforce for individuals with I/DD, DSP wages must be raised every time New Jersey's minimum wage goes up. A supplemental appropriation of \$16.5 million (plus \$16.5 million federal match) is needed in FY20 to mirror the 10% increase in New Jersey's minimum wage to \$11 p/h on January 1, 2020. An additional \$16.5 million in state funding (plus \$16.5 million federal match) is needed in FY21 to raise DSP salaries to accommodate the next increase to the minimum wage on January 1, 2021 to \$12 p/h.

We appreciate your attention to this critical issue impacting our families. Securing competitive wages for direct support professionals will help make New Jersey truly *Stronger and Fairer* for ALL. We can't wait any longer.

Sincerely,