

Testimony for the Senate Budget Committee
Robert Hage, President, The Arc of New Jersey
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Good Morning Senator Sarlo and members of the Senate Budget Committee and thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget and the impacts it will have on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) across the State. I am the President of The Arc of New Jersey, and father to a young woman with significant medical needs and developmental disabilities. Please know that my testimony represents both the many families I meet as President – families who are caring for a loved one with intellectual and developmental disabilities – and my own experiences and challenges I face as a father supporting and assisting my daughter Annika.

When learning of the Budget details in Governor's Christie's proposal, I was very happy to see increases for support services for people with I/DD. These funds go a long way for students aging out of their educational entitlements, families facing unexpected emergencies and housing vouchers that will allow individuals to live in the community. These are all important areas of our system and we are grateful that they are being addressed in the spending plan. However while these services are earmarked to do a lot of good, I fear that an increase for Direct Support Professionals was left out of the Budget and that is very concerning.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are the lynchpin of the service delivery system and they make a huge impact on the lives of people with I/DD, including my daughter. They teach independent living skills. They are there to help with employment and social activities. They assist with personal hygiene, and they allow parents, who are often responsible 24 hours a day for their loved one's care, respite time. My wife and I utilize respite, and like many others across the state, we are grateful for this service. A service that is only available because of a DSP.

Unfortunately, the average starting salary for a DSP is only \$10.50 an hour. For a provider agency, that is an unattractive proposal that makes it very challenging to hire and retain staff. And though that low wage means expensive and challenging ramifications for a business, for a family, the impacts are both tremendous and scary. If this matter goes unattended much longer, the workforce shortage will only increase and the trickle-down effect on families will worsen. So while new dollars for services is wonderful, without a robust and dependable workforce, the State is jeopardizing the critical services individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families rely and depend on. If as a father I can't find anyone to hire, and if community providers cannot hire and retain staff, who is going to deliver the supports my daughter needs? Who is going to support a person with I/DD as they work a job? Who is going to assist them with tasks of daily living? Who will engage people with I/DD and help integrate them in our communities? A DSP delivers all these services and more.

It is with all that in mind, that I urge you to include \$36 million in the FY18 Budget, which will receive a federal match from Medicaid, to increase all DSP wages by \$1.25 an hour. Doing so

will help ensure families like mine, and people like my daughter, will continue to receive the services they need. Thank you for your kind attention to this very serious issue.