
**Testimony on the FY18 Budget
Senate Budget Committee
Thomas Baffuto, Executive Director, The Arc of New Jersey
April 13, 2017**

Good morning, and thank you Senator Sarlo and members of the Budget Committee for the opportunity to testify about the FY18 Budget. The Arc of New Jersey is the largest statewide advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. We have 20 affiliated local chapters providing services in all 21 counties in New Jersey. Our mission is to enhance the quality of life of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families through advocacy, empowerment, education and prevention.

The Governor's proposed Budget for FY18 includes increased funding to assist students aging out of their educational entitlement, families facing unpredictable emergencies and housing vouchers so people with I/DD can live in the community. Unfortunately, the proposed Budget does not include any increase for our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who deliver the one-on-one supports. While The Arc of New Jersey applauds additional monies for supports, we are very concerned by the current DSP workforce shortage that will only be exacerbated if no action is taken to rectify it. The average starting salary for a DSP is just \$10.50 an hour which is making hiring and retention for both community provider organizations and families, a very challenging task. Providers report a remarkably high turnover rate of approximately **44%** and staff vacancy rates of more than **20%**. As you can imagine, it is very difficult for these organizations to run their operations when they are trying to cope with such significant workforce challenges. In addition to the difficulties facing providers, families looking to hire DSPs to support their loved one, are finding it very hard to find and keep a staffer.

If nothing is done to address wages for our Direct Support Professionals, we fear the workforce shortage is going to negatively impact the availability of services. Although the proposed budget recognizes the need for increased service dollars, those dollars do not help the system if we don't have the necessary staff to deliver the services. That is why we urge the Legislature to include a \$1.25 an hour increase for all DSPs in the FY 18 Budget. This \$36 million investment from the State will trigger a federal match via Medicaid. Doing so will help address the hiring and retention issues facing our workforce and will ensure the continuation of services to the many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and families who rely on these supports. Community integration for people with I/DD is not possible without Direct Support Professionals. The State of New Jersey must recognize that and take steps to fix it. A lack of action will have detrimental impacts on the service delivery system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.