

Legislation Establishing a Developmental Disabilities Trust Fund

Issue

The developmental disabilities service system in New Jersey has long been underfunded. Sadly, there are currently over 8,000 people on a waiting list to receive residential and in-home community-based services, and well over half of them have been deemed to be in the “priority” or “urgent” category. In fact, most families now find that they cannot access any services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities until their family is in crisis and can be deemed “an emergency”. Families also report that they are having an increasingly difficult time finding and accessing certain community-based services – such as medical and behavioral health services. Furthermore, community provider agencies haven’t had an increase in their contracts to match inflation in over 15 years and the current community infrastructure is in serious need of updating and improvements.

Concern

Given the economic climate of the past several years, it is imperative that we find new and creative ways to shore up this system and find much-needed additional funding for these critical needs. While funding to provide community-based services for people on the waiting list certainly needs to be annualized and addressed each year as part of the state budget, there are many other needs that qualify as “one-time” expenses which could be addressed in more creative ways.

Recommendation

Pass legislation establishing a *Developmental Disabilities Trust Fund* for monies collected in a variety of ways to fund one-time expenses for people with developmental disabilities, their families, and providers. Money would come into the trust fund in the following ways:

- A check-off on the NJ income tax form for a voluntary contribution
- The establishment and sale of specialty license plates, with the fee going into the fund
- The establishment and sale of specialty birth certificates, with the fee going into the fund
- Gifts, bequests, and contributions of cash or other assets from individuals and/or corporate entities
- Legislative appropriations
- Sale of a specialty “instant scratch-off” card

Funds would then be disbursed in the form of grants for one-time expenses such as:

- Capital and maintenance costs for residences and vehicles
- One-time home modifications
- Emergency respite
- Crisis intervention & emergency behavioral supports
- Training programs for healthcare professionals – doctors, dentists, behaviorists, etc.