



Putting People First

Diana Jones Ritter

October 16, 2009

Dear Friends:

Yesterday, Governor David A. Paterson outlined a two-year, \$5 billion Deficit Reduction Plan to eliminate the State's current-year budget gap. The Plan would have an impact of \$3 billion in the State's current budget year 2009-2010.

The largest piece of this Plan is a \$1.3 billion, 10 percent across-the-board cut to remaining local assistance spending – money that was planned for, but has not been paid out. For OMRDD, that could mean \$65.4 million in cuts that would have to occur before the State's fiscal year ends on March 31, 2010. From where I sit, this is a very dramatic and very difficult proposal.

The Governor explains that while other States have had to take drastic measures, including issuing IOU's because they didn't have the money to pay their bills, and selling state properties to cover their deficits, New York State and local services are still operating. Our credit rating remains strong. But this is a national economic crisis that has had its roots in Wall Street. As a result, tax revenues continue to come in below forecasts and our budget deficits continue to rise. These proposals that the Governor is suggesting are very difficult, and he is making tough choices. We have shared in this concern all along.

However, these proposals challenge OMRDD significantly. These reductions, if they are approved, are just unimaginable. Up until now, we have not had to cut services that people are currently receiving. We have clearly had to change the pace and scope of new opportunities but we have been successful in maintaining our system of existing services. However, should these reductions be implemented, cutting existing services could become a reality. This is something I have tried to avoid at all cost.

This is where our partnership with families, advocates, providers, our dedicated workforce and others has to come together and find solutions so we are not taking services away from the people and families who really, really need them. While that is happening, I will continue to strongly and vociferously advocate to protect the services that are so vital to the people we serve. I want you to know that I plan to push back and push back hard and will request flexibility in how we implement any final reductions – so that they don't hit essential services to the people we support and their families. The reality is that we will face some further reductions. The goal is to do in a way that protects core, existing services and the workforce that provides them. While we know that New York's financial situation cannot sustain what we have going forward – we have to adjust our expectations in recognition of the deep



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recession we are in and that despite the turn in Wall Street, recovery is not just around the corner.

In the coming weeks, I and my senior staff will be having significant discussions with providers, families, advocates, workforce and others to try to come up with additional approaches and strategies – to figure out what this all means and where we will go. I will be in animated discussions with the Division of the Budget, the Executive Chamber, and the Legislature to discuss the impact of these proposed reductions and alternatives that demonstrate our responsibility for addressing this budget deficit. We also assume that you will be conducting your own advocacy in support of the vulnerable population we serve and the workforce that we need to do that.

I apologize that I cannot get more specific on these proposed reductions; I simply do not know any more at this time. Rest assured, however, that I will be communicating with you to provide more information as it becomes available to me. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact myself, anyone from the Central Office Leadership Team or your DDSO director; we will try to answer your concerns the best way we can.

We will continue to put our mission of helping people with developmental disabilities live richer lives front and center as we weather this ongoing turbulent financial storm.

Sincerely,

Diana Jones Ritter
Commissioner