

#bFair2DirectCare Urges Governor & Legislature to “Finish the Job” and Fund Living Wage for Direct Support Professionals

Rallies in Albany and Poughkeepsie Thursday Call for a Living Wage for DSPs Who Support 130,000 New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities

ALBANY, NY – A bipartisan collection of state lawmakers joined hundreds of parents, self-advocates and non-profits that support people with developmental disabilities in Albany and Poughkeepsie Thursday to call for funding that allows direct support professionals (DSPs) to finally receive a living wage.

“Governor Cuomo stood in this very room two years ago and pledged he would not sign a budget that didn’t include funding for **#bFair2DirectCare** workers. We need him to make that same pledge now by including living wage funding in his state budget proposal,” **Tom McAlvanah, Executive Director of the InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies**, told a rally held in the “War Room” of the state Capitol in Albany.

McAlvanah, a former DSP, said: “We’re incredibly pleased that the Governor has outlined a 100-day justice agenda. But no 100-day justice agenda can be complete without funding a living wage for workers who support people with developmental disabilities. This is particularly true when you know that three-quarters of New York’s 90,000 DSPs are women and more than half are black or Latino. They and all of our DSPs deserve economic justice.”

Thursday’s rallies came as **#bFair2DirectCare** released data showing a worsening staffing crisis facing non-profit agencies that support persons with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other developmental disabilities.

The 2018 survey found a vacancy rate of 14.3 percent and a turnover rate of 26.4 percent for direct support staff in **#bFair2DirectCare** non-profits agencies. The inability to attract and keep staff forced the non-profits to pay an astounding 12 million overtime hours in 2018 – up 17 percent from last year and adding \$88 million in cost to the agencies’ already strained budgets. (See attached summary of vacancy and turnover rates and overtime hours.)

Former Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg, who served in the Assembly for 25 years and has a son, Ricky, with a developmental disability, said: “This is a critical issue. The crisis is here. If Albany doesn’t finish the job, the impact on people with developmental disabilities and their loving families will be like nothing anybody wants to experience.

“I know how things get done in the Capitol and I know the funding this community needs is loose change in a \$160 billion annual budget,” said Weisenberg, author of the recently published book “For the Love of a Child: My Life, My City & My Mission.”

Yvette Watts, a parent and executive director of the New York Association of Emerging & Multicultural Providers, said: “The DSPs are the backbone to the agencies and the families they serve. Because of our family and the fantastic DSPs, my daughter is able to live an independent and full life. DSPs are part of all of our families and deserve a living wage to take care of their families.”

Brad Pivar of the parent-led StateWide Advocacy Network (SWAN) said: As the parent of a child with a developmental disability, you learn very quickly that the DSP workforce is the heart and soul of the service system. SWAN, our statewide coalition of family groups, strongly support the efforts of the **#bFair2DirectCare** campaign.”

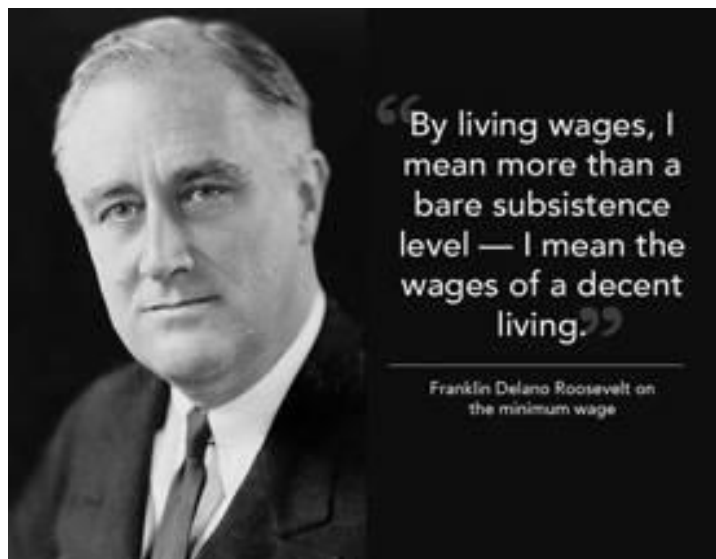
Betsy Fels, a DSP from Columbia County, said: “This must be the year that my coworkers and I can stop worrying about finally receiving a living wage. We have families to support. And we have wonderful New Yorkers who need us and we need to be able to focus on our jobs without worrying about making ends meet.”

In 2017, Governor Cuomo and the Legislature included the first two years of a six-year plan to provide a living wage for direct care workers. However, funding has not been committed for the rest of the plan, leaving these non-profits in a perpetual staffing crisis and DSPs struggling to make ends meet. When fully implemented, the living wage for a DSP would be roughly \$16.40/hour upstate, and roughly \$17.80/hour in New York City.

Direct support professionals are highly trained in a wide variety of critical areas that include administering medications, giving first aid and CPR, behavioral interventions, supporting independent living and ensuring the safety and opportunity of those they support. They are employed by non-profit agencies who and provide services on behalf of the state government, at rates set by the government. Some 90 percent of these agencies’ funding comes from government. Unlike fast food and retail outlets, **#bFair2DirectCare** agencies cannot raise prices or automate services to reduce staffing costs.

#bFair2DirectCare has grown since its inception as a coalition of concerned providers two years ago to include the voices of DSP, parent and self-advocates groups, who shared their powerful stories at Thursday’s Rallies.

Rallies took place at the New York State Capitol and Changepoint Church in Poughkeepsie. Lawmakers and other elected officials attending the Poughkeepsie rally included Assemblymember Didi Barrett (D-Columbia, Dutchess), Senator Sue Serino (R, C, IP-Hyde Park), Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro (R), and Thomas Gatto, Legislative Director for Assemblymember Aileen Gunther’s office (D, W, I-Forestburgh).



Senator Neil Breslin (D-Albany) said, "Living wages provide the stability and vested interest our disabled populations need from their support staff and Direct Support Professionals need from their careers. Moving forward with the **#bFair2DirectCare** living wage campaign would bring long-awaited relief to not-for-profit providers and enhance the lives of many families, workers, and disabled New Yorkers."

Senator George Amedore (R-Capital Region), ranking Member of the Senate Standing Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, said, “Direct service providers are on duty twenty four hours a day, 365 days a year. The love, care, and compassion they provide makes such a tremendous impact, and I’m proud to continue to advocate for proper resources to ensure direct care providers are properly compensated.”

Assemblymember Patricia Fahy (D-Albany) said, “New York’s not-for-profit providers rely on state aid for the majority of funding for key services delivered to people with autism, cerebral palsy, down syndrome, and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Direct Support Professionals who deliver support and essential services deserve a living wage for the vital care they provide.”

Assemblymember John T. McDonald III (D-Albany) said, “I fully support increased funding for direct support professionals who provide care to those with disabilities. I have worked with the disabled community for over 30 years and have seen firsthand the excellent work that service providers are doing for our communities. We must recognize the hard work of the direct care workers and their commitment to our vulnerable populations.”

Assemblymember Angelo Santabarbara (D-Montgomery/Schenectady/Albany) said: “As a father of a son with autism and as a state legislator, I’m continuing to fight for more opportunities for all those living with developmental disabilities, and that means supporting the direct care that is changing lives. Direct care workers possess incredible strength and dedication to the people they care for and are essential to their success and well-being. Unfortunately, our direct care workforce is facing a staff shortage that has become a crisis, directly affecting the care of those with developmental disabilities. The message is simple, when it comes to funding in this year’s state budget, direct care workers must not be left out.”

Assemblymember Didi Barrett (D-Columbia County) said: “Direct Support Professionals serve the most vulnerable members of our families and communities. It’s time they receive the respect, professional recognition and compensation commensurate with the vital work they do.

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