

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR FROM A DSP

I am one of New York State's 100,000 direct support professionals (DSPs), providing support every day to New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities. You've probably seen me, or someone like me, working in the community. I proudly work with these wonderful people and their families so they can all live in the community and have full and rewarding lives.

While my paycheck comes from a community not-for-profit agency, the money to pay me comes mostly from government programs. The Governor has said that in New York, we believe in a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I want to thank the Governor and the Legislature for including raises in the current budget to begin to address a workforce crisis in our field and for their commitment to include additional support in April of 2018. However, I can't wait another four years to be paid a Living Wage. The crisis is getting worse. New York State needs to accelerate funding for a living wage for DSP workers' salaries over the next three years. I would urge the Governor and the Legislature to accelerate these increases in reimbursement rates for the local not-for-profits that provide these invaluable services beginning in January of 2019.

DSP's salaries used to start several dollars above the minimum wage. Because of the stagnant pay, now we start at the minimum wage or just above. I know far too many co-workers who left for clerical or retail sales jobs last year. They didn't want to give up our special profession. They just couldn't afford to stay. In fact, the annual turnover rate in New York State is nearly 27 percent, 7.5% more than last year. As a result, most not-for-profit provider agencies have vacancy rates in excess of 14 percent, a 30% increase since 2016 in these important jobs.

Those workers who left were supporting families in our community, some working with children with autism; others supporting citizens with Down syndrome or cerebral palsy or a family dealing with a loved one with a serious brain injury. Imagine how you would feel if your family needed that help, but it was no longer available in the community, but only in an institution.

I support the #bFair2DirectCare Coalition's Campaign for a Living Wage. Fast Food workers are starting at wages it took me years to reach. While my job is rewarding, it is also demanding and every week I see another direct care worker leave because we no longer make much more than the mandated minimum wage. That's a shame and it has to be corrected before it is too late.

So join me, the people and families I support and some wonderful community organizations and write to Governor Cuomo and your state legislators today. Tell them that you support your community, your neighbors and the #bFair2DirectCare campaign.

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