Governor Hochul touts the Empire State as a leader in the fight for equity. Her vision of the “New York Dream” promises opportunity and dignity for *all* citizens, yet New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), and those who care for them, remain forgotten.

The system of supports and services New Yorkers with I/DD rely on is rapidly eroding. New York’s leaders are accountable for this system. Our elected officials must face the crisis they’ve allowed to perpetuate, and they must correct it.

For well over a decade, inflation has far outpaced the state’s investment in services for New Yorkers with I/DD. The state made no investment in our system for ten years. Last year’s increase was announced as a “historic investment” for the field. Realistically, that 4% increase didn’t even cover half the cost of inflation. Year after year, providers have been forced to make do with less than they needed.

Today, they are *doing* less than is needed.

As [your role – Executive Director, staff, family member, etc], I live the reality of a system in crisis every day. An already long wait list for care is growing.

Our workforce is faltering. More than 20,000 positions direct care positions are vacant across the state. Essential shifts go unfilled. We cycle through a revolving door of support staff in a field where continuity of care is critical. Programs are shuttered. Facilities are degrading. People with disabilities are being displaced from their homes, while others are living in isolation with no opportunity for engagement or connection to their community.

[You can share your personal experience here about what services mean to you, and the impact of the crisis].

Across New York, 100,000 dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) deliver essential supports and services to people with I/DD around the clock, every day. While the cost of living skyrocketed, DSP pay stagnated. Today, the average DSP starting wage is just over $16 an hour. These complex and critical roles have become minimum wage jobs.

Imagine you have a child who needs support with the most basic tasks of daily living. Imagine that, over time, your child came to trust their support staff with intimate care. Imagine that staff has come to understand the nuances of your child’s nonverbal communication, their medical needs, their food preferences, their emotional triggers, how to soothe them in stress, how to make them smile.

Now imagine that staff leaves. Imagine they leave, because they aren’t earning enough to put food on their table.

The skill, complexity and responsibility of direct care work is deeply devalued.

In turn, the people they support are devalued.

That’s not equity.

That needs to change.

Advocates for New Yorkers with disabilities are calling for a 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and a Direct Support Wage Enhancement in the 2023-24 budget.

This COLA would compensate for *one year’s* inflation. It would merely meet rising costs and keep our system from slipping further. The Direct Support Wage Enhancement would invest an additional $4,000 in each of our dedicated DSPs – raising their pay about $2 an hour.

It is a minimal investment, but it is a needed investment.

If New York is truly committed to equity and dignity for all her citizens, it’s an investment that must be made.