New York state provides supports and services for 130,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) across the state. 85% of these services are provided by nonprofit providers like [Chapter name]. Just 15% are provided by state operated and run programs. All of these programs are funded by the state, but they are not being funded equitably.

As [your role], I am faced with the impact of our escalating staffing crisis every day. Let me be clear. Our system of support for New Yorkers with I/DD is eroding. Without staff we cannot meet the needs of individuals and families. Without staff we cannot guarantee the safety and wellbeing of the people we support.

In their five-year strategic plan released last year, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) acknowledged the critical need to solve the workforce crisis. They stated that their primary goal was to, “improve the recruitment, retention, and quality of the direct support workforce” by “investing in the workforce.”

They followed through with their commitment for Direct Support Professionals at state-operated facilities, but did not include the nonprofit workforce.

New York State has provided two wage increases for their state-operated direct care workers in the past year, including a 13% increase in calendar year 2022, $4,000-$6,000 proposed increases in 2023, and an additional $50M announced in 2024.

Today, our DSPs and other frontline staff are now making only 70% of what their state counterparts make – doing, the same job and supporting the same individuals in the same state-funded system. It is difficult enough to compete with for-profit national conglomerates, who offer better wages and less responsibility. Now we must compete with state run facilities within our own field, where people are earning $23-$25 per hour, compared to $16 with our providers.

This is not equal pay for equal work. And it is not an equitable investment in the New Yorkers with disabilities supported in different branches of the same system. It destabilizes our entire field, and places the people we support at risk.

The state has articulated the need to address our staffing crisis and increase wages for Direct Support Professionals. The state has met this need for their own staff. They need to meet it for ours. If they do not, our programs will continue to be reduced or eliminated due to lack of staffing, and many years of progress toward community integration, choice, and deinstitutionalization will be lost.