



SEEING ABILITIES NOT DISABILITIES.

Legislative Alert

August, 24 2009

Developmental disabilities, like Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Autism, begin in childhood and may prevent people from living independently without substantial help. Over 22,000 adults and children with developmental disabilities receive community based services, including residential, employment and day programs. **Over 19,000 people with developmental disabilities are on the State's Waiting List for these same services, and thousands of people waiting are in crisis.**

When state coffers were full, the State largely neglected these important services, both refusing to provide minimally adequate inflation rates, and limiting access to services for people, many of whom continue to be in crisis.

Because Maryland now faces serious fiscal challenges, policy-makers want everyone to "share the pain." This would be a more equitable proposition if people with developmental disabilities had shared in the good times as well, but this did not happen.

One in three providers of services to people with developmental disabilities already have a negative operating margin. If the state cuts funding for services that are already significantly under-funded, it will create a severe crisis. Likely repercussions will include discontinuation of services for some people, especially those with significant disabilities, discharging of people who require uncompensated care, and closing of programs that are no longer fiscally viable. In addition, the basic safety and health of some people with disabilities may be jeopardized.

Some argue that if state employees must feel the pain, so too should direct support staff in the community. However, the workers in the community continue to earn far less than their counterparts in state institutions. Whereas, the state reimburses community providers \$9.18 per hour for direct support workers, recent job postings showed starting wages of \$12.42 per hour for state employees. Although efforts by the State and providers to raise the low wages of community-based staff have improved the situation, community staff still lags behind their state peers. Telling community

workers to "share the pain" will only push the best employees to better-paying jobs in other community settings, such as nursing homes and assisted living providers, and people with disabilities will suffer.

Lastly, reducing access to essential care and supports will ultimately increase the costs to the State of Maryland by shifting costs to state institution, hospitals, and Medicaid.

Marylanders with developmental disabilities cannot afford any further reductions in funding, While state policy-makers face difficult choices to balance the budget, this is one area they cannot afford to cut.

If you would like to protest these possible funding cuts, please e-mail or write to the following individuals:

The Honorable Martin O'Malley

Governor
State of Maryland
State House
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-974-3901
Or, [Click Here](#) to contact the Governor through e-mail.

The Honorable John M. Colmers

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The Honorable T. Eloise Foster

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The Honorable Peter Franchot

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Please contact Lee Kingham, *Executive Director* of Abilities Network at 410-828-7700 with any questions.