

The Harvey & Ellen Weisenberg Foundation

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3-14-17 For Immediate Release

Caregivers to New York's Most Vulnerable Encouraged by Legislative Budget Initiatives

Hundreds of thousands of New York residents and their families rely upon the care of direct support professionals who work in the non-profit sector providing human and daily-living services to some of our state's most disabled citizens. Yesterday, this under-paid and under-appreciated group of dedicated professionals was earmarked in the Assembly and Senate's respective versions of the state budget for desperately-needed funding to boost their woefully inadequate salaries.

In New York, the average pay of direct support professionals is so low that many of them are forced to work two jobs just to make ends meet or to leave the profession they were called to and work in the fast food industry, which, incredibly, offers a better salary.

This intolerable situation led to the creation of a statewide coalition entitled, "#Fair2DirectCare." The coalition consists of thousands of individuals from across the state with disabilities such as autism, down syndrome and cerebral palsy, their family members and advocates, non-profit providers and the direct care workforce itself.

Harvey Weisenberg, a former state Assemblyman and parent of an adult son, Ricky, who was born with multiple disabilities, has been a strong voice for this cause and is encouraged by this week's budget developments. Weisenberg is a strong leader in the #Fair2DirectCare movement and has dedicated his considerable political expertise toward helping people in need.

"I extend my heart-felt appreciation to the leaders of both houses, Senator John Flanagan and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, for putting people ahead of politics," Weisenberg stated. "Government has an obligation to care for those who cannot care for themselves. The lack of a living wage in this profession has impacted the quality of care and the quality of life for so many. I am so proud of my former colleagues on both sides of the political aisle for coming together in our current climate and sending a united message of hope to everyone in this state who lives with disabilities."

Once the Legislature approves their respective budgets this week, negotiations between the two houses and governor will begin in earnest. Hopefully, Governor Cuomo will bolster the spirit of bi-partisan good will brought to the table by legislative leaders and recognize the situation for the crisis it has become.

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