

**ID/A COALITION**  
**THE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND AUTISM SERVICES COALITION OF**  
**PENNSYLVANIA**

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Press Release  
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**Parents Warn That Cuts Will Hurt People with Intellectual Disabilities**

Members of the Pennsylvania State House Human Services Committee expressed alarm Tuesday at the impact of across the board cuts in state funding to organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disability, and asked the Department of Public Welfare to meet with the providers and families testifying within 45 days with a plan to address the issues that were raised.

“If these providers have trouble fulfilling their mission, we’re all going to be in a lot of trouble,” said State Rep. Thomas Murt, chair of the House Human Services Committee’s subcommittee on Mental Health. Murt presided over a hearing at the State Capitol called to discuss the -6 percent “rate adjustment factor” that the state’s Office of Developmental Programs implemented in November, which cut funding to organizations that provide residential and other support services to people with intellectual disability.

Murt and many of his colleagues on the committee were clearly moved by the plight of service providers and by the testimony of parents, including Tom and Linda Michael who brought their 22 year old daughter Sarah to the hearing. The Michaels told of their anguish in learning that funds were unavailable to provide support for Sarah once she left high school. Born with an intellectual disability, Sarah needs constant supervision and care, they said.

“The system offers us no relief,” Tom Michael said, “no programs, no funding, no help in any way.”

Michael argued that the cuts that have been enacted will force many families to put their adult children in state institutions, as there will be fewer community organizations able to care for them in community homes and little support for families caring for adult children with special needs.

“The state has to provide institutional care at an estimated \$200,000 a year,” Michael said, “that’s eight times the cost of the funding we requested for Sarah.”

Yet the current across the board rate cut “compromises the very services that are a potential solution to our current economic situation,” explained Rob Reid, president and CEO for Access Services Inc., which supports more than 2,600 people in community-based services in Eastern Pennsylvania.

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THE ID/A COALITION CONSISTS OF STATEWIDE ADVOCACY AND PROVIDER ORGANIZATIONS ADVOCATING FOR SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND AUTISM IN PENNSYLVANIA.  
FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT ANY OF THE ORGANIZATIONS LISTED:

PA ASSOCIATION OF REHABILITATION FACILITIES (717.657.7608)  
PA WAITING LIST CAMPAIGN (877.372.WAIT)

PA ADVOCACY AND RESOURCES FOR AUTISM AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES (717.236.2374)

DISABILITY RIGHTS NETWORK (1.800.692.7443)

PA COMMUNITY PROVIDERS ASSOCIATION (717.364.3280)

THE ARC OF PA (717.234.2621)

UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY OF PA (717.975.0611)

Reid warned lawmakers that the cuts enacted in November are crippling the provider system that is a lifeline to people with intellectual disability. He said that many organizations are facing closure because they can't meet their bills, or they will be forced to drastically cut the quality of the care they provide to vulnerable people.

"We have tightened our belts but have reached our limits. We support consumers 24 hours per day 365 days per year," added Jim Bobeck, CEO of Step by Step, Inc. which offers services in over 15 counties. "Cutting service anymore is impossible without putting lives at risk."

"The negative impact of this rate structure on individuals with disabilities is not surprising," said Mark Murphy, CEO of the Disability Rights Network. Advocates and parents also spoke to the Department's lack of inclusion when making critical policy decisions. "I need you to understand that policy and fiscal changes affect us, the families in service," added Maureen Westcott, a parent of a young woman with intellectual disability and also advocate for The Arc of Pennsylvania.

"The Department of Public Welfare has been making decisions and statements that are dangerous to the health and safety of people with intellectual disability who depend on DPW's services," Shirley Walker, president and CEO of PAR - Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities - told the lawmakers. "We are asking that DPW honor the Governor's stated commitment that these services are a priority – a core responsibility of government. We are asking that DPW honor the Governor's stated commitment to practice full disclosure, transparency and integrity as we work together on changes that need to be made."

Walker asked legislators, "As one news article put it this week, has DPW become so desperate that it has resorted to "waging a war on the weak?" Walker represents organizations that provide residential and non-residential care to over 51,000 people with autism and intellectual disability.

George Kimes, Executive Director of the PA Community Providers Association shared with the committee some ways that providers were attempting to deal with the recent rate cuts, including no longer providing certain services. "Even if other providers are able to assure that services are available for the consumers affected, lifetime relationships between the people we serve and their caregivers will be destroyed, as new providers substitute lower-paid, less experienced workers for those laid off, resulting in significant disruption in the lives of the people we serve," explained Kimes. "Providing lifetime care for people with intellectual disability is not the same as manufacturing widgets."

Michelle Sipple of FamilyLinks, a private non-profit agency in Allegheny County that provides Supports Coordination services to over 2,900 individuals, told the committee shifts in services are not always seamless. "The transition to another agency will take months and that assumes another agency is available and willing to take on the

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individuals under this current fee schedule. It will also mean that vast amounts of historical knowledge on our vulnerable population will be lost as well.”

“The Department of Public Welfare is telling the public that it is reducing the waiting list? The waiting list is being reduced on the backs of people already in service,” said Sheila Stasko, with the PA Waiting List Campaign, an advocacy group that seeks to reduce the number of people who need services but are on a waiting list to receive them. “People with intellectual disability and their families have worked hard of the past 20 years to develop a community system that puts people first,” she said. “It is now being destroyed.”

“We are here today to ask that the program established by the Commonwealth is not diminished or harmed,” said Gene Bianco, President and CEO of the PA Association for Rehabilitation Facilities. “State funding of the program must match client needs. Services that are needed and that have been ordered must be paid for at approved and reasonable rates.”

“I believe there needs to be a commitment to support the most vulnerable people in our state,” Reid said, “even during this difficult economic period.”

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