

[Organization Letterhead]

Dear Senator Rivera, Assemblymember Paulin, Senator Brouk, and Assemblymember Gunther,

As co-leaders of the Civics League for Disability Rights representing Independence Care System (ICS), the first and only Health Home program in New York providing care coordination and services to support the health, mobility, and independence of people with physical disabilities, we stand united with New York healthcare providers in strongly opposing the proposed \$125 million cut to the Health Home program in the SFY 2024-25 New York State budget.

The Civics League is an independent, volunteer-led group of New Yorkers with disabilities dedicated to advocating for the constitutionally guaranteed right of people with disabilities to live independently in our communities. We are deeply concerned with this proposal, which would impede our independence and ultimately decimate our health and quality of life. This proposal would gut the Health Home program—one that is vital to thousands of high-risk individuals, including people with physical disabilities, one of the most underserved and vulnerable populations in the State.

As people living with disabilities, we fight daily to get the services we need. Routinely overlooked, our population suffers from more health conditions and dies early deaths because the healthcare system does not meet our needs. Without an organization like ICS, it is harder to get a wheelchair and more challenging to get essential supplies like catheters to prevent urinary tract infections and A&D ointment to avoid pressure injuries. Four years ago, the State closed ICS's managed long-term health plan, essentially forcing ICS to transition to a health home. While the Health Home has never been a perfect fit for ICS or our needs, it is the only organization advocating for them. This proposed \$125 million cut to the Health Home, in addition to the already approved significant cut in this year's budget, will eventually force the ICS Health Home to close. This would, once again, leave our members with complex health challenges and needs with nowhere to turn for essential quality care and services.

ICS ensures that members, many of whom require 12 and 24 hours of home care, have access to routine health services, accessible primary care, and care coordination to support them in achieving better health and reduce the barriers and challenges they face with receiving quality care. Without ICS, many will end up in nursing homes or unable to survive.

The news of this proposal comes as a shock, especially in the wake of Governor Kathy Hochul's recent 2024 State of the State, where she noted that she'd strive to expand access to primary care for adults with complex needs and that the State will "increase support for healthcare providers serving individuals with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities." The healthcare system is endlessly complex for people with physical disabilities. The Governor must recognize the skills required to get a person with a physical disability to secure a primary care visit. From identifying an accessible office with equipment to facilitate a complete exam, like a weight scale and a table that goes up and down, to ensure the clinician knows about the disability, to locating accessible locations for standard tests like mammograms, colonoscopies,

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disability-competent care navigation is essential to health equity for people with physical disabilities. The proposal to cut millions in funding for the Health Home program is unacceptable and contradicts the Governor's promises just a few weeks ago. The needs of people with physical disabilities must be met, not shunned. Additionally, this proposed cut contradicts the recently approved 1115 Waiver amendment, which calls for critical care management and Health Home programs to address the needs of Medicaid recipients.

The continuation of the Health Home program will ensure that we can continue to live independently in our communities. We ask you to reject this unconscionable cut to the Health Home program, to stand with the 180,000 individuals who depend on Health Homes, and to work with Governor Hochul in prioritizing the health and wellness of people with disabilities across the State. New York State can and must do better; our lives depend on it

Sincerely,
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