

## Senator John Mannion Roundtable – NYS IDD COVID Response – June 3, 2021

*Statement from: Russell Snaith, NYADD Founder*

*Greetings Senator Mannion & NYS Senate Standing Committee on Disabilities,*

Thank you for your work in advocating for those with Disabilities and for hosting this important forum. My name is Russell Snaith, and I am the Founder of NYADD, the New York Alliance for Developmental Disabilities. We are a statewide grassroots family advocacy group that was triggered by COVID and the need to advocate for the rights and well-being of those with Developmental Disabilities. We have rapidly grown to 6,000 Members in just 13 months.

COVID disproportionately impacted those with Developmental Disabilities in the following ways:

- 1) PPE distribution was not prioritized appropriately for IDD Service Providers.
- 2) Testing was not made available (and required) – as it was in Nursing Homes.
- 3) The IDD Population was not included in any of the NY Unpause Phases – and there were no published metrics to drive the easing of restrictions.
- 4) Parents/Guardians were denied entry into Residences, while staff could come and go based on a temperature check. A Parent or Guardian must be deemed “Essential” and provided equal access as staff at all times and especially during a crisis.
- 5) Lockdowns and isolation from family and community have wrought serious social and emotional harm, as individuals with IDD may be unable to understand and cope with sudden and prolonged changes in their routines. This leads to anxiety, depression and challenging behaviors.

In addition to the above immediate impacts, an already strained and underpaid Workforce has been decimated and is now in full-blown crisis and a state of emergency. Like the straw that broke the camel’s back, COVID fueled and aggravated what is now a **Perfect Storm** for the destruction of the field:

- 1) People afraid to work in the field due to COVID.
- 2) Unemployment Benefits that discourage working.
- 3) A rising Minimum Wage.
- 4) State workers (DSPs) being paid at a higher rate than voluntary service providers are funded to pay.
- 5) A Self Direction Model that permits DSPs to be paid more than the voluntary service providers can pay.
- 6) No COLAs for years, continuous cuts and year after year of underfunding.

The **Workforce Crisis** is not about money, it is about priorities.

Service Providers are scrambling, and families are worried. There are not enough DSPs to staff Group Homes or Day Programs. When a shift cannot be covered, residents are relocated and sleep on air mattresses. This is very disruptive and unfair. Day Programs are experiencing 80% Vacancy Rates; that is, those that have not closed. As a state, we are failing our most vulnerable citizens. At what point do we call this neglect and discrimination?

I implore Governor Cuomo, the NYS Legislature and OPWDD to prioritize and work together to solve this crisis. They must come up with pay rates that attract and retain the staff required and essential to maintain and sustain a viable Workforce.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Russell Snaith*

Russell Snaith, NYADD Founder