



Liberty Calls for Fair Wages at Rally

AMSTERDAM- Liberty ARC hosted a rally today at the Riverfront Center in Amsterdam, NY advocating for an increase in NYS funding to support fair wages for direct support professional (DSPs). The call went out to Governor Andrew Cuomo and state representatives to ensure they include \$45 million (each year, for the next six years) in the 2017 NYS budget. This crucial funding will assist in meeting the rising minimum wage increase.

Liberty was joined by state lawmakers Senator George Amedore, Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, as well as local dignitaries Amsterdam Mayor Michael Villa and Amsterdam County Legislator Robert Purtell. Also in attendance were sister agencies; Schenectady ARC and their executive director Kirk Lewis, Lexington Center's Division Director of Business and Community Relations, Wally Hart as well as representatives from The ARC of Ulster-Greene. Direct support professionals Susan Davis of Liberty ARC and Bonnie Frasier of Lexington Center shared their personal perspectives on the wage issue.

Citing eight years without a significant Medicaid rate increase to support higher salaries, combined with state mandated wage increases, new federal overtime guidelines and an increase in competition from other employment sources, ARC representatives emphasized the importance of increased state funding support.

“We have enormous respect for our Direct Support Professional and therefore strongly believe that they deserve a living wage that matches their extensive training, job responsibilities and commitment to the individuals they support,” said Liberty ARC CEO Jennifer Saunders, “This proposed funding, which is absolutely essential to ensuring that Liberty is able to continue to provide top-quality care, has to now become approved legislation in New York’s 2017 budget.”

Senator George Amedore said, "Our direct service providers provide care and service to the most vulnerable members of our population, and do so with compassion, respect and love. They deserve to be fairly compensated -- they are too important in the lives of our developmentally disabled. I am committed to fight for funding in the budget to cover the increased wages because we cannot afford to sacrifice or compromise the outstanding work our direct care providers do in our communities."

Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara said, “My son, Michael, was diagnosed with autism at age 3. He’s 15 now, and he’s able to do things today that would not be possible without the amazing direct-care support from amazing individuals doing great work in our communities. As a father and state legislator, I’ll keep working for more opportunities that help all those living with developmental disabilities and for those that provide the direct care that is changing lives. These amazing individuals include support professionals, drivers, cooks and more — and they’ve always been there for our families, our friends and our neighbors. It’s time to give our nonprofit direct-care providers the fair pay that they deserve and keeps them providing the services our families rely on every day. I know what we can accomplish together.”

Kirk Lewis, Executive Director of Schenectady ARC said, “Our Direct Support Professionals are our most important employees. They work directly with people who depend on Schenectady ARC for critical supports and services in every aspect of their lives 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our inability to pay our DSPs a living wage has created a workforce crisis, a crisis that threatens to undermine all the services we have developed, and the progress that we have made, in the last decade. Our DSPs are not doing minimum wage work—we should not be forced to pay them minimum wage. We urge the Governor to support the funding request of the #BFair2DirectCare coalition and provide funding for agencies like Schenectady ARC to pay their employees a living wage.”

“To many of us DSPs, these are not just people we support. These individuals are a big part of our communities, our lives, and even our families. These are people that many of us have come to know and love,” said Liberty direct support professional Susan Davis. “At the same time, this is our livelihood. This is our chosen profession. We need to support ourselves and our families and should not have to struggle to do so. We deserve to be paid a professional wage.”

NYSARC, Inc. is the largest not-for-profit in New York State serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The 53 Chapters comprising NYSARC, Inc. are located in every county in New York State. The Organization supports over 60,000 individuals, employs over 30,000 people and has a membership of over 110,000. Liberty ARC, Schenectady ARC, Lexington Center and the Arc of Ulster-Greene are member chapters of NYSARC.

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