
Governmental Affairs Update

Sharon Levine, Director of Governmental Affairs & Communications

On Thursday, June 30, Governor Christie signed a \$34.5 billion State Budget that includes \$79 million in growth to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in New Jersey. The funding outlined in the final document represents a big commitment to community living by way of a significant increase in the number of housing vouchers as well as funding to address the Waiting List. These were both high-priority items in The Arc of New Jersey's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget campaign. Overall, the State Budget is very much in-line with our top advocacy areas.

The Budget also includes monies to assist people moving out of developmental centers, to address the needs of students as they age out of their educational entitlement, and to respond to emergencies. Additionally, the FY17 Budget includes funding for community providers as they transition to fee-for-service. Unfortunately, a line item of \$20 million added by the Legislature for direct support professionals was vetoed by the Governor.

We are thankful to all of the families, self-advocates, local County Chapters of The Arc and community partners who unified behind our budget message, participated in our action alerts and supported our work.

Legislation

The Arc of New Jersey is also pleased to report that a number of bills we've supported at the State House continue to move through the legislative process. Of particular importance is Senate Bill 1163 which establishes limits on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools. We previously testified in favor of the legislation when it was heard in the Senate Education Committee and recently we advocated for the bill to be heard by the full Senate. We are happy to report that prior to the end of the fiscal year, S1163 passed in the Senate with a vote of 38-0. We will continue our work on this matter in the Assembly when Committee meetings resume in the fall.

Additionally, Executive Director Tom Baffuto and Board President Bob Hage testified before the Assembly Human Services Committee in favor of A3824 which would establish an Office of Ombudsman for individuals with I/DD and their families. The goal of this legislation is to help individuals and families navigate the system, access services, and discover resources. In addition to one-on-one assistance, the Ombudsman's office will be required to track data and issue recommendations based on trends and current procedures. Bob spoke about his family's experience navigating the service delivery system, accessing services and the importance of information to individuals and families - especially in light of all the ongoing changes at the

Department of Human Services. The bill was later passed by the full Assembly.

Additionally, the following bill was passed by the full Senate in June.

- SJR15 - Designates July 22 of each year as "Fragile X Awareness Day."

Comprehensive Waiver Renewal

Executive Director Tom Baffuto provided comments on the Comprehensive Waiver Renewal Application to the Division of Developmental Disabilities at a listening session on June 29. The State is in the process of collecting feedback from stakeholders and then they will submit their document to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for their review. This was an important opportunity for The Arc of New Jersey to weigh in with decision-makers about how the proposal will impact individuals with I/DD and their families. In addition to the feedback we delivered at the listening session, we will also submit written comments prior to the August 12th deadline.