



## Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs

ANDREW M. CUOMO  
Governor

DENISE M. MIRANDA  
Executive Director

April 16, 2019

To: Denise Miranda, Executive Director

From: Davin Robinson, Executive Secretary to the Advisory Council

Re: Advisory Council Recommendation on Workforce Recruitment and Retention

The Justice Center Advisory Council is authorized by the Protection of People with Special Needs Act to provide guidance to the Justice Center in the development of policies, programs and regulations. One of the duties of the Justice Center is to advise and assist the governor and public and private entities in the development and implementation of state policies which meet the needs of vulnerable persons and individuals with disabilities in a manner that is respectful of the rights and choices of vulnerable persons and individuals with disabilities. The recommendation below was approved, unanimously, by the full Advisory Council at the April 4, 2019 meeting.

### **Background:**

New York has more than 200,000 nonprofit human services workers, contracted by the state and local governments to take care of our children, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable citizens.

As the economy has improved, it has become more difficult for service provider agencies to recruit and retain staff given the current starting and average salary levels service provider agencies are able to pay. The improved general employment rates, while welcomed by all, reflect increased competition for fewer skilled, capable staff. The changes in minimum wages for selected fields of employment will greatly exacerbate these challenges. The average turnover rate statewide last year was 33 percent, which is very concerning as we know that turnover of staff has a major negative impact the people who receive services.

Since 2011, the state budget has eliminated statutory cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) for this sector, resulting in over \$700 million in lost wages for the workforce — money that would have made a real difference in the lives of these employees, a constituency that is approximately 80 percent female and 50 percent individuals of color, whose average salaries range from \$23,000 to \$30,000 per year. These low salaries force many people working in the human services field to hold more than one job to support themselves and their family.

In addition to adequate reimbursement, the human services workforce also needs better access and support for receiving training and education to effectively support people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations succeed.

**Recommendation:**

1. Provide ongoing funding support regardless of the funding source for a human services COLA.
2. Fund loan forgiveness programs for people working in human services to both encourage people to work in this critically important field and support those working in the field without a college degree to pay for college and improve their knowledge and skills.
3. Support a credentialing system to recognize the contributions and competencies of members of the workforce who learn and apply best practices and evidence-based skill and knowledge in their jobs. This process should be integrated into the state's reimbursement rate schedule to pay for performance.