



North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency  
Special Education and Therapeutic Excellence

973-772-0148

High School

[www.njedda.org](http://www.njedda.org)

Montclair State University  
Budget Hearing  
March 9, 2016  
Testimony

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**Dr. William G. Weiss, Executive Director**  
**North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency**  
**Clifton, New Jersey**

We would like to thank the New Jersey Assembly for providing us with the opportunity to testify today.

I am Dr. William Weiss, Executive Director, of the North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency. Our organization provides educational, therapeutic, and medical services to 260 children and adults with multiple physical and neurological disabilities. I am here today with our high school graduating students and families to speak of our 2016-2017 budget concerns.

For the last thirty years our agency has operated an Adult Medical Day Care and Adult Training Program. We are licensed and supported by the Division of Developmental Disabilities to serve our population of adults with severe physical and intellectual disabilities. We have 14 of our high school graduates in need of an adult training program with medical services.

We are also appreciative of the one-time contract adjustment for providers totaling \$10 million for infrastructure costs incurred as the system moves to fee for service. This will provide a 1 percent adjustment for FY 2017 to each provider. We request that these funds also be maintained in the budget to be submitted by the Legislature.

However, we must bring another very important issue to the table. Despite the items above, the service delivery system for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New Jersey is experiencing a workforce crisis of unparalleled magnitude. The average salary for DSPs, the individuals who work daily and directly with the support recipients is \$10. This is not conducive to quality community supports. With no rate increases for the past 8 years, it has been increasingly more difficult to hire, train, and retain qualified staff members.

Direct support professionals in New Jersey earn \$24, 257 on average while those employed in developmental centers earn \$40,350 for comparable positions;

- Costs such as healthcare and utilities have increased at a more rapid rate than the CPI (14.1 percent) over the past eight years. For example, the Milliman Medical Index, which measures actual expenditures for healthcare, has increased 70.1 percent during the past eight years;

- According to the most recent data from the Social Security Administration, the median wage in the U.S. increased 11.7 percent during the seven year period through 2014. Yet, some providers have been unable to provide a general salary increase to their staff for eight years.

Service providers are facing unprecedented changes at the state level with a transition to fee-for-service as well as changes at the federal level with the Department of Labor's Overtime Rule and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Home and Community Based Final Rule.

- The DOL overtime exemption rule change, as currently proposed, will require providers to pay overtime to anyone making less than \$50,000 as opposed to the current threshold of \$28,000; or raise everyone's salary to \$50,000 so as to keep them exempt from overtime. This federal mandate comes with no additional funding from CMS! Providers have no means of increasing rates.
- Discussion of raising the minimum wage to \$15 will also require increased funding from somewhere. Is the state, if Medicaid will not increase the rates for services and supports, going to be in a position to provide state only funds to keep the doors of providers open? Each \$1 increase in salary of DSPs in the DD world will cost \$50 million. A jump of \$5 in the minimum wage will cost a quarter of a billion dollars.

It is incumbent upon the executive and legislative branches of state government to work with the individuals requiring support, their families, and the service provider community to address these very real issues that threaten the viability of the support system.

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**Ivan Lopez, Parent**  
**Rosa Maisonet, Grandmother**

Dear Senators,

As parents/guardians of Valentina, we would like to ask the Senate for more funding for children with developmental disabilities as well as for adult day training programs.

Our children need services such as physical therapy, speech therapy, and much more. Valentina is an individual with complex medical conditions and because of this, we ask for more funding as it will prove to be very useful and valuable for children who suffer from diverse medical conditions. Funding can aid our children with disabilities to live more independently when their families cannot be present.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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**Valentina Lopez, Student**

Good Morning,

My name is Valentina Lopez. I will graduate from NJEDDA High School in June. I am here to ask you to make sure funding is available for programs for disabled adults so we may continue to be as independent as we can be.

I want to work and use all the skills I've learned in school and in therapy, but I need the support of a program.

Thank you.

**Roger Lope, Parent**

My name is Roger Lope and I am the father of Kelly Lope. Kelly has Rett Syndrome which leaves her incapable of any purposeful use of her hands and feet, rendering her completely dependent on someone for all her daily personal needs and feedings. She has specialized medical issues including seizure disorder. Kelly has attended the North Jersey Elks Developmental Disability Agency since early intervention so she could receive the education and therapies she needed. She has made marked improvements in her abilities that frankly would not have occurred without these needed interventions and programs. This agency has been a God send to Kelly and my family. Kelly's mother passed away in 2008 and full responsibility of all Kelly's personal and physical needs have fallen on me. Also included in this time was the raising of her brother and sister. There is just no way one man can do this without the help of these agencies. We needed your help and are eternally grateful for it.

Kelly will graduate in June and finding a placement for adult medical day program has been extremely arduous and next to impossible. There are few programs that are medically based and have long waiting lists. Funding is desperately needed to expand for the demand of medically based adult programs.

I urge you to please fund programs to assist Kelly and other families in these situations so the disabled person will thrive and have a humane quality of life. In addition, enabling the parents who care for the disabled person to work and provide financial and family needs. It would be impossible to work and meet our family's financial needs without an adult medical program for my daughter Kelly.

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**Kelly Lope, Student**

My name is Kelly and I am 21 years old. I am graduating from NJEDDA this year in June and I would like to have a place to go each day. I do not want to stay at home every day with nothing to do. I have acquired many skills while I have been in school and I want to be able to use them.

Thank you.

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**Peter Matos, Student**

Good Morning,

My name is Peter Matos. In June I will be graduating from NJEDDA High School.

I definitely want to work and someday I would like to live in an apartment. I need help from a program so that I won't have to stay at home all day.

Please make sure there are funds for programs for disabled adults.

Thank you.

**Joseph Lopez, Student**

Hello, my name is Joseph Lopez. I am graduating from high school this year. After graduation I do not want to stay home. I would like to go to an Adult Program and continue to work in the community.

Thank you.