

New York State Assembly

Annual 2024 Report

Committee on
People with Disabilities



Speaker Carl E. Heastie
Rebecca A. Seawright, Chair



Rebecca A. Seawright
Assembly Member 76th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Committee on People with Disabilities

COMMITTEES
Banks
Codes
Judiciary
Ways and Means
Higher Education

December 15, 2024

Honorable Carl E. Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Speaker Heastie:

I am pleased to submit the 2024 Annual Report for the Assembly Committee on People with Disabilities. It is an honor to be the Chair of this committee. The committee members and I remain dedicated to putting forth legislative solutions that address the challenges New Yorkers with disabilities face.

Over the past year, I have heard from many in the community and their voices guide my work. Improving access to services continues to be a chief concern. Service providers have reported high vacancy rates amongst direct support professionals, and low wages contribute to higher turnover rates. This impacts the availability of services across the state as well as the quality of the services individuals receive.

During this past session, we utilized budget initiatives and legislative efforts to try and address these issues. The Assembly passed legislation to improve and expand access to services, help individuals find direct support professionals, and promote competitive, integrated employment amongst people with disabilities. The committee continues to report legislation that will support people with disabilities in having a wealth of opportunity to live the life they choose in their community.

Once again, thank you for your support for the Committee on People with Disabilities. People with disabilities and their families appreciate your efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca A. Seawright".

Rebecca A. Seawright
Chair
Assembly Standing Committee on People with Disabilities

**2024 ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**Rebecca A. Seawright
Chair**

Committee Members

Majority

Khaleel Anderson
Chris Burdick
Taylor Darling
Harvey Epstein
Karen McMahon
Stefani Zinerman

Minority

Jodi Giglio, Ranking Minority Member
John W. McGowan

Committee Staff

Courtney Ferrissey, Committee Clerk

Program and Counsel Staff

Janice Nieves, Assistant Secretary for Program and Policy
Elizabeth McCormick, Legislative Analyst
Alice Bagley, Executive Secretary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
STATE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS	5
SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATION	6
HEARINGS AND ROUNTABLES	7
APPENDIX A	8
APPENDIX B	9
APPENDIX C	10

INTRODUCTION

The Committee on People with Disabilities focuses on ensuring that all people with disabilities, including developmental and physical disabilities, are provided the opportunity to participate fully in their community.

The Committee has legislative oversight of programs administered and licensed by the State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). The Committee also has statutory oversight over the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD). OPWDD serves over 100,000 New Yorkers every year.

The Committee also works closely with the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health, the Assembly Standing Committee on Health, and the Assembly Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities to ensure the Assembly is helping improve the lives of all people with disabilities in New York State.

During the 2024 legislative session, the Committee reported several bills meant to address pressing issues for people with disabilities, such as employment rates and increasing access to services.

This report describes the Committee's major legislative activities during the 2024 session.

STATE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024-25 Enacted Budget includes critical resources for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. The Enacted Budget provides an increase of **\$111 million** for the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) over the Enacted Budget for SFY 2023-24. In addition, the Legislature provides an increase of **\$44 million** over the Executive proposal. For SFY 2024-25, total OPWDD funding is **\$7.5 billion**.

Within OPWDD, the following proposals and appropriations were enacted in the 2024-25 Budget:

- \$960,000 in funding for various Legislative initiatives for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

The Legislature provides a 1.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for human services providers, and additional 1.7% targeted salary increases to support staff, direct care staff, clinical staff, and non-executive administrative staff – The COLA is authorized starting April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025. The total state share cost for SFY 2024 is **\$244.4 million** for all Mental Health agencies, with **\$91.5 million** for OPWDD providers.

SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATION

The Committee on People with Disabilities is committed to supporting and advancing legislation that will improve the lives of people with disabilities in a variety of ways. This year, the Committee on People with Disabilities reported out and the Assembly passed the following significant legislative measures:

1. Independent Developmental Disability Ombudsman Program

A.1577-A (Buttenschon)/S.3108-A (Mannion)

Veto memo 97

This bill would establish additional responsibilities for the Independent Developmental Disability Ombudsman Program to ensure effective service delivery, including establishing a telephone hotline, website, and assisting individuals with paperwork.

2. Definition of Developmental Disability

A.5016 (Santabarbara)/S.7664 (Ashby)

Reported to Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

This bill would expand the list of qualifying diagnoses for services through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to include spina bifida.

3. Task Force on Employment for People with Disabilities

A.6397-A (Burdick)/S.8379-A (Ramos)

Passed Assembly

This bill would establish a task force under the Department of Labor to promote competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities.

4. Direct Support Professional Registry

A.6400-A (Seawright)/No Same As

Reported to Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

This bill would establish a registry of direct support professionals who have completed an approved professional education or training program.

5. Blue Ribbon Commission on the Service Delivery System for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

A.9553 (Seawright)/S.8782-A (Mannion)

Passed Assembly

This bill would establish a Blue Ribbon Commission to conduct a study on systemic reforms that can be made to ensure a sustainable set of supports and services are available to all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

HEARINGS AND ROUNTABLES

Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing

On February 13th, 2024 a joint legislative budget hearing on Mental Hygiene was held to examine the 2024 Executive Budget proposal. The purpose of this hearing was to hear from stakeholders and the Commissioners of the Office of Mental Health, the Office of Addiction Services and Supports, the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs, and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to have questions answered on the content of the budget and hear about other budget related issues.

The Commissioner for the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Kerri Neifeld, testified about the agency's efforts to increase recruitment and retention of direct support professionals (DSPs). These efforts include continuing their credentialing program with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals and the State University of New York and beginning a statewide recruitment campaign for DSPs. She also testified about investments being made to increase independent housing opportunities and efforts to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The hearing included testimony from stakeholders, such as service providers for people with disabilities, advocacy coalitions, and family members. Nearly every witness testified about the urgent need for a financial investment in developmental disability services, mentioning high vacancy and turnover rates for DSPs that continue to impact the delivery of quality services. To address this, witnesses asked for the inclusion of a 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment in the Assembly and Senate's One House Budgets.

APPENDIX A

2024 SUMMARY SHEET

SUMMARY OF ACTION ON ALL BILLS

REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE ON

People with Disabilities

TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD 3

ASSEMBLY SENATE TOTAL

BILLS BILLS BILLS

BILLS REPORTED FAVORABLE TO:

Codes	0	0	0
Judiciary	0	0	0
Ways and Means	6	0	6
Rules	0	0	0
Floor	1	0	1
TOTAL	7	0	7

COMMITTEE ACTION

Held For Consideration	0	0	0
Defeated	0	0	0
Enacting Clause Stricken	0	0	0
REMAINING IN COMMITTEE	17	3	20

BILLS REFERENCE CHANGED TO:

Social Services 1
Ways and Means 1

TOTAL	2	0	2
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APPENDIX B

FINAL ACTION ON BILLS REPORTED BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN 2024

ASSEMBLY BILL # SPONSOR	SENATE BILL # SPONSOR	FINAL ACTION	DESCRIPTION
A.1577-A (Buttenschon)	S.3108-A (Mannion)	Veto memo 97	Establish additional responsibilities for the Independent Developmental Disability Ombudsman Program to ensure effective service delivery, including establishing a telephone hotline, website, and assisting individuals with paperwork.
A.5016 (Santabarbara)	S.7664 (Ashby)	Reported to Assembly Committee on Ways and Means	Expand the list of qualifying diagnoses for services through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to include spina bifida.
A.6397-A (Burdick)	S.8379-A (Ramos)	Passed Assembly	Establish a task force to promote competitive integrated employment of people with disabilities.
A.6400-A (Seawright)	No Same As	Reported to Assembly Committee on Ways and Means	Establish a registry of direct support professionals who have completed an approved professional education or training program under OPWDD.
A.8483 (Burdick)	S.8028 (Stewart- Cousins)	Chapter 67	Amends Chapter 745 of the laws of 2023 to provide that building owners have efficient and effective emergency evacuation plan established for people with disabilities in high-rise buildings.
A.9523 (Seawright)	S.3105-A (Mannion)	Veto memo 54	Require the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to publish a report on staffing, facility closures, and clients waiting for care at state-operated residential facilities between April 1st, 2024 and December 1st, 2024.
A.9553 (Seawright)	S.8782-A (Mannion)	Passed Assembly	Establish a Blue Ribbon Commission to conduct a study on systemic reforms that can be made to ensure a sustainable set of supports and services are available to all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

APPENDIX C

LAWS ENACTED IN 2024

ASSEMBLY BILL # SPONSOR	SENATE BILL # SPONSOR	FINAL ACTION	DESCRIPTION
A.8483 (Burdick)	S.8028 (Stewart- Cousins)	Chapter 67	Amends Chapter 745 of the laws of 2023 to provide that building owners have efficient and effective emergency evacuation plan established for people with disabilities in high-rise buildings.