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**MANHATTAN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL**

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30<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Breakfast, March 9, 2018

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**WORKFORCE ISSUES**

Presented by Monica Santos  
Director of Residential Services, AHRC  
March, 2018

I am the director of residential services at a large agency. When I started in the field in 1991, I had a college degree and two years of teaching experience, and there were so many people applying for a limited number of direct support jobs in residences that I was offered only a weekend position.

Here we are now, struggling because we cannot get the direct support professionals (DSPs) we need due to the very low salaries these staff are paid. Funding for salaries comes from government, and the rates set by New York State determine the amount providers can afford to pay. Providers have virtually no other sources of revenue and must rely on the State for additional funding to be able to raise salaries.

In many agencies the increasing minimum wage is now surpassing entry level salaries for DSPs, who could readily get easier work at Target for the same money. To make ends meet, many DSPs work several jobs, which affects the quality of their work and negatively impacts the people they support.

The staffing crisis is worsening. The turnover rate is 27%, meaning nearly one in four people leave, an increase of more than 7% since 2016. We are having difficulty filling positions, and the vacancy rate has climbed to 14%, meaning one in every seven positions is unfilled, an increase of 30% since 2016. It is estimated that providers are paying over 10 million hours of overtime to cover the vacant positions. We hear of many residences that have gone to a minimum staffing pattern which ensures that people can evacuate safely but does not ensure the quality of life that we hoped people would have when we closed institutions.

We want our DSPs to make a living wage, which we estimate is \$17.72 an hour downstate. Last year's small salary increases are helpful, but we are still a long way from obtaining the decent wage that DSPs need and deserve. Initially, we thought a series of wage increases over 6 years would be effective. But the increasing turnover and vacancy rates demonstrate clearly that we cannot wait 6 years. We need increases much faster: in 2018, 2019, and 2020. Otherwise, staff shortages will endanger the very health and safety of the people we serve.