



The Arc of Pennsylvania Responds to Governor Wolf's Budget Initiatives

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Harrisburg, PA: The Arc of Pennsylvania is closely monitoring the FY 2016-2017 state budget process on behalf of persons with autism and intellectual/developmental disabilities, their families, and the people who support them. The organization particularly notes the plight of over 4,000 individuals who are recognized by the Commonwealth as having a need for, and a right to, support services and yet have been on the intellectual disability emergency waiting list for years. Being on the emergency waiting list means these individuals risk becoming segregated and institutionalized at much greater financial cost, if the state does not provide support when their family members are no longer able to care for them due to being elderly, sick, or having a disability themselves.

Governor Wolf's proposed \$33.3 billion budget includes some increases that are important to providing services that are life lines for people with disabilities and their families, but does not address the workforce crisis facing direct service professionals and proposes the lowest waiting list initiative in five years - addressing only a small portion of the emergency waiting list and leaving hundreds of graduating students home without services. The Arc of Pennsylvania is startled at this backwards step in funding.

The organization is dismayed with both the overall investment in Pennsylvanians with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as the inattention in this proposed budget to the wage and staffing issues facing support staff. Support staff work with Pennsylvanians with disabilities each day while receiving minimal pay, leading to extremely high turnover in staff. For Pennsylvania to have a truly robust community support system, the state must make investments to have a trained and sustainable community-based workforce.

Acknowledging that many of the proposed increases are a restoration of previous cuts, Executive Director Maureen Cronin states that "The Arc of Pennsylvania will work diligently to support portions of the budget proposal that are positive for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while pushing for more waiver funding to be made available to individuals desperately waiting for services. We firmly believe that the state's budget should be the Commonwealth's moral testament to an inclusive society where individuals with disabilities live and work as independently as possible."

Recognizing the difficult budget climate, The Arc of Pennsylvania commends Governor Wolf on his plans to restore the cuts to base services that severely impacted human services funding four years ago; to increase special education funding; to increase funding for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation so that Pennsylvania can continue leveraging use of federal matching funds available to support Pennsylvanians with disabilities in securing employment; and to improve general education funding, which directly impacts the educational outcomes of students with disabilities.

Pennsylvania absolutely cannot repeat the budget fiasco of this current fiscal year. The Arc of Pennsylvania calls on the legislature and the Governor to begin negotiating immediately to develop a budget based on facts, not ideology, and to have a fully enacted budget by July 1, 2016. The local chapters of The Arc are non-profit organizations providing critical services to people with disabilities. The extreme delays of payments this year for services have caused undue hardships for the people The Arc supports as well as local chapters of The Arc. The plea for an on-time budget that meets the needs of people with disabilities and their families - a feat that was not unsurmountable in previous years - cannot be overstated.

The Arc of Pennsylvania will continue advocating for a budget that empowers the most vulnerable in our communities - a budget that helps those with disabilities who are presently confined to their homes get the support they need to seek employment and community connections; a budget that helps high school students find meaningful, sustainable work that prepares them for adult life; and a budget that supports families through providing respite care for caregivers.

For 67 years, The Arc of Pennsylvania has worked to ensure that children and adults with autism and intellectual/ developmental disabilities receive the supports and services they need, are included in their community, and have control over their own lives. The non-profit organization is part of The Arc US and is affiliated with 34 local chapters in 57 counties, representing 8,000 members across the Commonwealth. The Arc of Pennsylvania advocates for quality services and to protect the rights of our constituency, providing information and resources to families, and increasing public awareness.

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Editor's Note: The Arc is not an acronym; always refer to us as The Arc, not The ARC and never ARC. The Arc should be considered as a title or a phrase.

The Arc of Pennsylvania
www.thearcpa.org