



**Joint Finance Committee Testimony
Presented by Thomas Cook on the
Governor's FY 2020 Recommended Budget for the
Division of Developmental Disabilities Services
February 21, 2019**

Good afternoon, Representative Johnson, Senator McDowell, OMB Director Jackson, Secretary Walker, Division Director Nonnemacher, and citizens of the First State. My name is Thomas Cook. I am the Executive Director of the Ability Network of Delaware, a statewide association that includes 24 organizations that provide services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

I want to thank OMB Director Jackson for working with the Joint Finance Committee last year to include \$4.67 million in the FY 2019 DDDS budget. This funding resulted in an overall increase in provider rates of 6.6%, the largest amount granted by the General Assembly since 2005, which was the last time the published rates for services for adults with I/DD were fully funded.

I also want to thank all the members of the General Assembly who are with us today who voted last year to pass the McNesby Act, which is now a part of the State Code for I/DD services. It commits the state of Delaware to phase in rates paid to service providers to 100 percent of the benchmarked levels established in a rate study published last month, which was done by the national experts at JVGA who were responsible for creating the rates that were put into place in Delaware in 2004 and who have done similar work for I/DD services in nine other states.

I'd like to ask the members of the Joint Finance Committee to raise your hand if you have visited a neighborhood group home or a day program that serves adults with I/DD.

For those who raised your hands, I'll bet you noticed some things about the staff members of the nonprofit agencies you visited. We call these workers Direct Support Professionals, or DSPs

for short. In preparing my testimony this year, I asked Ability Network’s members to share some data about their DSPs that may shed some more light about these people.

Here’s what I learned from 11 of our member agencies about the 1,245 DSPs who they described, people like Chelsey Delgado who you met a few minutes ago:

- 1,045 (84%) of them belong to a minority group – most are either African immigrants or African Americans;
- 965 (78%) of them are women;
- The average age of the DSPs working for these agencies is 38 years – for most, this is either their chosen profession or one they would like to be employed in long-term;
- Many of them work a second job, in order to make ends meet, so they can continue working with adults with I/DD; without the additional jobs, they’d qualify for assistance given to people living in poverty – even with working a second job, they may still qualify for these programs, including SNAP, based on their family size.
- The DSPs live in every part of the state, including Wilmington – they are some your hardest-working constituents.

Every year, the Ability Network honors the contributions of these dedicated individuals on “DSP Day.” This year we will be back at the Chase Center with several hundred DSPs for the 10th anniversary of this event. I invite every member of the Joint Finance Committee to join us on August 29, 2019. At this event, I will ask the following questions of the DSPs who are assembled for the awards luncheon, the same questions I have asked for the past two years:

- How many DSPs in the audience have worked during a shift that was short-staffed?
- How many DSPs had to work overtime because of staff vacancies in their program?
- How many DSPs have to work at a second job in order to make ends meet?
- How many DSPs have had thought seriously about whether they can continue doing

this work?

Although I didn't count the hands that went up and stayed up, I can tell you that it's been over half of the people in the audience for the last 2 years. That is truly frightening when you stop and think about the future of services to adults with I/DD. Without the DSPs in that room and those who work every day in communities throughout the First State, these services would not exist.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a \$100 million problem facing us, which can only be solved by the decisions that this Committee will make over the next three years. To operate at the levels recommended by the Department of Health and Social Services in the market study that was mandated as part of the McNesby Act, an additional \$42 million needs to be appropriated in the DDDS budget so that federal matching funds of \$58 million can be obtained. Those are big numbers. But if we can get at least 1/3 of the total state funding that is needed - \$14 million – for each of the next 3 years, we can stop the downward spiral of turnover rates that continue to climb.

If the members of this body meet the challenge, we can will stem the tide of DSPs leaving the employment of the state's nonprofit community agencies for better-paying jobs elsewhere. If on the other hand, the General Assembly follows the advice of those who urge austerity instead of spending what's needed to save these services, you can be assured there won't be any DSPs left working in the nonprofit agencies to provide these critical services in as few as three years from now, because they'll be working at Christiana Care, or Amazon, or Target for more money. Instead, the responsibility will have to shift back to the state to employ DSPs, presumably at an even higher cost, as Delaware falls back to the way services were delivered thirty years ago.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.