

Who Is Kathy Hochul?

BY BRYAN O'MALLEY, EXEC. DIR.
CDPAANYS

On Jan. 5, 2022, Gov. Kathy Hochul will give her first State of the State address. About three weeks later, she will lay out her 2022-2023 budget proposal.

This is the only time she will do this before she runs for a full term as Governor, meaning it will send a large signal as to what, and who, she thinks is important. These presentations lay out the Governor's vision and priorities for the year to come.

As she outlines her policies, the disability community will be watching to see who Gov. Hochul is. Will she continue former Governor Cuomo's hostility to the disability community and home care, or will she look to enact policies that move home- and community-based services forward? The stakes couldn't be higher as Hochul decides what will be included in her address.

What makes the cut for the speech is indicative of what will appear in the state's budget, and it is more important than ever that real investment in community-based long-term care, with wage increases, are included. Fair Pay for Home Care (A.6329 (Gottfried)/S.5374 (May)) is an opportunity for her to show an actionable plan that is ready to be implemented. It would guarantee home-care workers earn at least \$22.50 per hour across the state, and make sure that this wage increases as the minimum wage itself goes up in the future.

Passing Fair Pay would reverse a decade-long trend of divestment in Medicaid home- and community-based services (HCBS) that has caused the worst workforce crisis in the United States; made the problems faced by COVID-19 even worse; and is currently intensifying our hospital and nursing home staffing shortages by eliminating preventive care that can keep people out of these settings to begin with. If it is included in the State of the State, we will be dramatically closer to success. Unfortunately, large, systemic change is rarely that simple.

The state's long-term care system is at a breaking point. A recent CDPAANYS report on the consequences of low wages showed that more than half of the workers who quit gave low pay as the reason and that nearly a quarter of CDPAA consumers supplemented their worker's payments out of pocket. People with disabilities and seniors who cannot hire or keep workers are at direct risk of injury or being placed in an institution against their wishes, with one in ten saying it took more than a year to hire new workers.

This is not just an economic issue but also a civil rights issue. The 1999 Supreme Court decision *Olmstead vs L.C.* mandated that states must provide services in the least restrictive settings possible, placing HCBS as the standard of care. New York must ensure the workforce is in place to provide services to comply with the law, and the only way to do so is to significantly raise worker pay.

The need to invest in home care has gained attention at the Federal level, with the support of President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Schumer. Supporting Fair Pay for Home Care is a chance for Gov. Hochul to own the issue in New York and to serve as a national model for other state leaders.

In pledging to invest in care giving and the workers that are its lynchpin, she could reverse the more than decade-long trend of neglect that has led us to the brink. It will be a heavy lift, but taking on these lifts lets her show she can demonstrate the leadership New York needs and deserves.

Who is Governor Hochul? On January 5, we will start to find out.

