Murphy Administration Takes Action to Support Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

$24 Million in Temporary Wage Increases for Direct Support Professionals in Group Homes & Supervised Apartments; New Guidance for Hospitals on Families and Loved Ones

April 29, 2020

(TRENTON) – The Murphy Administration today announced $24 million in state and federal resources for temporary wage increases for the direct support professionals who care for adult individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in group homes and supervised apartments - $10.6 million in state funding and $13.4 million in federal matching resources. With these funds, beginning May 1 the Departm of Human Services will implement a temporary $3 per hour wage increase for these professionals for three months, in response to the COVI 19 pandemic.

The Administration also announced new guidance to require hospitals to allow a designated support person to be with an individual with a disability during hospitalization.

"Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in the community benefit from the dedicated work of direct support professionals who provide critical care and supports in group homes across our State," said Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson. "Direct support professionals are essential workers ensuring that there is 24/7 support for some of our most vulnerable residents. Their hard work with residents, who often have underlying health conditions, is making a tremendous difference at this critical time. Today's action is intended to recognize and value this essential work. With today's hospital guidance, the Administration is also recognizing the critical role DSPs, families and guardians play in supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities at this challenging time."

"Having a family member or other support person by your side while in the hospital can provide a reassuring and familiar presence during what may be a stressful situation," Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli said. "At the same time, through appropriate screening, we are continuing to maintain the safety of hospital staff and other patients."

New Jersey Human Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities provides supportive services to about 8,000 adult individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in group homes and supervised apartments across the State. These settings are staffed by direct support professionals (DSPs) who ensure that residents receive daily support with their needs and are able to achieve their personal goals. The wage increase will apply to DSPs in these settings, begin on May 1 and be in place for three months.

The New Jersey Department of Health also announced new guidance requiring hospitals to allow a designated support person to accompany an individual with a disability during a hospitalization despite other restrictions on visitors at this time. The designated support person may be a family member, personal care assistant or another disability service provider and is subject to screening by the hospital and required to be asymptomatic for COVID-19.

Today's announcements build on the steps the Administration has taken to help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Human Services has:

- Closed day programs where individuals participated in daily congregate activities to reduce risk;
- Provided bridge payments to day program providers;
- Enhanced payments to group home providers to allow them to bring in additional staff given the added time residents are at home;
- Modified rules to quickly allow families and providers to hire workers to support their loved ones;
- Restricted visitors to group homes to reduce risk;
- Delivered PPE to group homes and supervised apartments, as well as family homes where aides come into the home;
- Released guidance on requirements surrounding hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting, and critical supplies for group home providers; and,
- Worked proactively to address the critical needs of individuals during this unprecedented event.

The Administration understands that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities face particular challenges in this difficult time, including having their regular routines disrupted, being unable to participate in day programs and employment, and not being able to receive visitors in their homes. These are tremendous challenges, and the Administration will continue to take all available steps to best support their needs in this very difficult time.

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