

**Testimony of Service Employees International Union, SEIU Local 200 United,
Jerry Dennis, Union President.**

New York State Budget Hearing
November 27, 2007
Syracuse, NY

New York State leads the nation in providing services for people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities, mostly through non-profit providers. SEIU Local 200 United represents hundreds of these workers across the state.

Despite the numbers of jobs these services create, providers struggle to attract and retain qualified direct care staff. Paying wages hovering around the poverty level for a stressful, difficult job makes for rapid turnover and chronic job vacancies. As a result, providers often lack enough experienced caregivers to provide the care that people with developmental disabilities deserve and are entitled to. The comfort of familiar faces to the consumers is a luxury many will never experience. Instead, high turn-over produces new caregivers, which prohibits a safe and comfortable environment.

The state legislature fully understood the incessant need to fund this industry through the passage of S.6455-C and A.9555-C in the 2006-07 TEC budget found in Chapter 55 of 2006 and S.2104-C and A.4304-C, which pursuant to Chapter 54 of the laws of 2007 will provide an additional funding of \$2.5 million dollars annually for adjustments to rate of payment or state aid to not for profit agencies regulated by OMRDD. This additional funding will allow projects that increase direct care staff, increase training and education of direct care staff, decrease staff turn-over through improved wages, benefits or other means, or other efforts related to recruitment and retention of direct care staff. This program is in effect from April 1, 2007 through March 31, 2010.

On behalf of our members, and the consumers they care for, we ask that the Governor continue to fund such projects. The consumers receiving the care as well as the workers giving the care deserve a safe and consistent environment to live and work in.

Thank you for your time.

Jerry Dennis, President
SEIU Local 200 United

1153 West Fayette Street, Suite 302
P.O. Box 1540
Syracuse, NY 13224