

Governor Eliot Spitzer and
New York State Division of the Budget
Albany, New York

Thank you for the opportunity to comment during the hearings for the 2008-09 New York State Budget. We represent Directions in Independent Living, an independent living center located in Olean, NY. Our mission is to support people with disabilities, and their families, with an array of supports and services including:

- assistance with Social Security applications
- benefits advisement
- housing advisement and referral
- accessibility design and training
- transportation
- job readiness training
- living skills training
- community transition
- representative payee
- mental health services
- support groups, such as Bi-Polar, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Teens with Disabilities
- peer advocacy
- community and other referrals

A large portion of our operational funding comes directly from VESID, a division of the State Education Department.

We also receive funding from Cattaraugus County's Reinvestment Funds for Mental Health Services. From 2005 to 2006, our consumer base directly receiving services rose by thirty percent, but VESID funding for our 2007 projected consumer base went up only eleven percent from the 2005 allocation. We are also serving an increased number of consumers from Allegany County, an area not presently served with an independent living center.

We are asking you to increase your allocations, through VESID, the Office of Mental Health, other avenues, and directly, to all Independent Living Centers, including ours. We serve a greater percentage of the population each year, and we desperately need more funding to keep up with the demand.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
Leonard Liguori, Executive Director, and the staff of
Directions in Independent Living
Olean, NY