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Medicaid **Medicaid Matters New York** *Matters*

Advocates celebrate creation of independent, individual advocacy assistance for people with I/DD in this year's budget

Medicaid Matters New York, the statewide coalition representing the interests of people across New York State served by Medicaid, thanks Governor Hochul for including \$2 million in the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) budget to create the independent intellectual and developmental disability ombudsman program. The coalition also thanks Senator John Mannion for his leadership to advance legislation to create the program in the Mental Hygiene Law.

Thanks to this new program, people with I/DD, their family members and their advocates will now have help navigating the complex system of services and care coordination intended to provide for their needs and choices. The program will be available statewide and will provide advice and advocacy support to individuals with I/DD, their family members, and advocates.

We applaud this as a vital first step in ensuring better services and assistance for people with I/DD. We look forward to working with OPWDD to ensure the program operates independently and includes functions and activities to make a meaningful difference in the lives of people with I/DD and the system of I/DD services that serves them.

Background:

People with I/DD deserve an independent avenue for addressing their needs and concerns. Independent individual assistance services of this type are already available to people enrolled in Managed Long Term Care (MLTC), Health and Recovery Plans (HARP), and the Fully-Integrated Duals Advantage program for people with I/DD (FIDA-IDD) through a program called the Independent Consumer Advocacy Network (ICAN). Similar services are available to people seeking mental health care and treatment for substance use disorder through a program called the Community Health Access to Addiction and Mental Healthcare Project (CHAMP).

The Office of the Advocate for People with Disabilities was reinstated as the Office of the Chief Disability Officer in 2022. We applaud the Governor for signaling her administration's commitment to advancing and protecting the interests of people with disabilities. The creation of the independent advocacy assistance program is critically important to that intent. While the program will be funded by the state, it must operate independently. The independent nature of the program is vital, as people with I/DD need a venue for resolution of issues accessing services and navigating the complex system intended to serve them, some of which are provided and/or authorized by the state.