

NYSSLHA 2022 Advocacy Agenda

NYSSLHA LOBBY DAY: STATE BUDGET ISSUES

As this issue of the Communicator goes to print, Governor Kathy Hochul and State legislators are in the midst of State Budget negotiations with a goal of enacting a final plan by April 1, 2022.

On Tuesday, February 15, NYSSLHA held a virtual Lobby Day organized by Reid, McNally & Savage on State Budget issues. Those in attendance included NYSSLHA President Amy Bergen, Past President and GA Chair Matina Balou, and members of the GA Committee: Tracy Panzarella; Sal Gruttadauria; and Joseph Sonnenberg.

Meetings were held with top finance and program staff for the Senator Majority Leader and Assembly Speaker, and staff for the Chairpersons of the Senate and Assembly Education, Senate Higher Education, and Health Committees.

State Budget proposals put forward by Governor Hochul which were discussed during the February 15 Lobby Day and NYSSLHA's positions are summarized below. In addition, NYSSLHA recommends that a new proposal be added to the State Budget to provide an 11% increase in Early Intervention rates.

Support Increase (11%) Preschool Special Education Tuition Rates

NYSSLHA strongly supports the Governor's State Budget proposal to increase tuition rates for preschool special education services by 11%. Quality preschool programs that provide special education services to children with disabilities can improve the skills of children and their readiness for kindergarten. When children who have developmental disabilities, or are at risk for them, receive services early they show positive changes in health, language, communication, cognitive, and social and emotional development.

Support Adding an 11% Rate Increase for Early Intervention (EI) Services

NYSSLHA is strongly advocating for a 11% rate increase in the EI program to be added to the 2022-23 State Budget by the State Legislature. The EI program has not received a rate increase in nearly two decades with the exception of a 5% increase in 2019 for a limited segment of the provider population.

An 11% rate increase will assist EI providers in meeting the growing costs of business due to administrative burdens imposed by the Department of Health (DOH), help to mitigate numerous cuts to program over the last 10-15 years, increase provider participation in the program, and ensure that infants and toddlers have timely and adequate access to services.

Children receive the best outcomes when they are reached at the earliest possible stage in life. The EI program does that by providing services to infants and toddlers up to age three. The CPSE program serves preschool children ages three to five. An investment in both EI and

preschool education rates will help to ensure that children have access to the professionals and services that they need to achieve optimum success.

Support 1% Increase in Medicaid Rates & Restoration of 1.5% Across the Board Medicaid Rate

NYSSLHA strongly supports Governor Hochul's proposal to increase Medicaid rates by 1% and to restore the 1.5% across the board reimbursement cut to all Medicaid providers that was enacted last year.

Historically, the State's Medicaid program has not adequately reimbursed providers, particularly those providing EI services, for increased costs and policies such as wages. Providers have not had a trend factor increase to pay for the increase in the minimum wage and the basic expenses of providing care to low-income, elderly, and disabled individuals.

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, New York State has lost millions of jobs as businesses scaled back and closed. As a result, many people lost their employer-sponsored health insurance. In the nine months following the arrival of COVID-19, New York State had a 12% growth in Medicaid enrollment, the largest increase since the September 11th attacks. As of December 2021, 7.3 million New Yorkers were enrolled in Medicaid.

Support Telehealth Parity

NYSSLHA strongly supports the Governor's proposal to establish parity for telehealth services by requiring insurance companies, including those in Medicaid, to reimburse providers for services delivered through telehealth on the same basis, and at the same rate, as services delivered in person.

Due to increasing demand for quality early intervention services and personnel shortages of EI and Medicaid providers, the quality and quantity of services available for children with disabilities and developmental delays has been negatively impacted. Telehealth services hold real promise for making patients' lives easier, saving money, and bringing specialized care to underserved communities.

Oppose Moving Professions from NYS State Education Department (SED) to NYS Department of Health.

NYSSLHA is opposed to the Governor's budget proposal to transfer complete oversight and regulation of certain professions who work in both the health and education domains, including speech-language-pathologists (SLPS) and audiologists, from the State Education Department to the New York State Department of Health.

Approximately 80% of SLPs in the State work in a school setting. Under current NYS Education law and rules, SLPs require a teaching certification in addition to licensure to provide services in schools. The State Education Department currently regulates school-based settings. They are experts in the training, education, and other requirements that are necessary to provide an optimal learning environment for children who are in need of special education and other related educational support services. The Department of Health, which regulates health facilities such as

hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, and EI programs, does not have this expertise or the necessary familiarity and oversight required in the certification process.

SLPs and audiologists have a strong relationship with the SED Office of the Professions and rely on their experience, knowledge, and expertise to ensure that revisions in State Education law and regulations can be accomplished quickly and efficiently to best serve our patients. NYSSLHA strongly supports oversight and regulation of our professions remaining with SED.

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