



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

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**Governor Shapiro Visits Allegheny County Non-Profit Serving
Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism to Highlight How
Proposed Budget Investments Would Expand ID/A Services and
Support Direct Support Professionals**

Governor Shapiro has been traveling the Commonwealth and meeting with the ID/A community, advocates, and families – from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia to the Lehigh Valley – to hear top concerns firsthand and learn how his Administration can help.

The Governor's 2024-25 budget proposes \$483 million to increase reimbursement rates for direct support professionals and \$78 million to serve an additional 1,500 Pennsylvanians in the next fiscal year.



Pittsburgh, PA – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** visited Achieva in Allegheny County to meet with Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities and autism (ID/A), caregivers, and advocates and hear how the proposed funding in the Governor's [2024-25 budget](#) will increase access and support for home and community-based services by increasing wages for direct support professionals and end Pennsylvania's emergency waiting list for ID/A services.

Governor Shapiro heard firsthand from Achieva staff, those they serve, and their families about the dire need for more direct support professionals and more services for the ID/A community. At Achieva alone, there are 100 vacant positions for direct support professionals – all of them desperately needed workers to help provide everyday services and quality of life care to the ID/A community. Across the Commonwealth, there is an 18% vacancy rate, which translates to a shortage of about 10,000 direct support professionals.

"We have a responsibility to the 60,000 Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities and autism to deliver services for them and to ensure the dedicated direct support professionals who work hard to support the ID/A community are compensated," said **Governor Josh Shapiro**. "The Commonwealth currently has a shortage of 10,000 direct support professionals across Pennsylvania – and that's because we don't pay them enough. This year, my budget makes a historic investment – nearly half a billion dollars from state and federal funding – to pay those who are caring for some of our vulnerable neighbors a higher wage, to attract more people to this noble profession, and ultimately, to deliver more services to those who need them."

In February, Governor Shapiro invited [Cindy, Judy, and Matthew Jennings](#) to his [2024-25 budget address](#) in the Capitol Rotunda. During the address, the Governor shared how Matthew requires 24/7 support, something that his mother Cindy hasn't been able to find because Pennsylvania doesn't pay direct support professionals enough. So instead, Cindy, a 60-year-old single mom who's battled her own health challenges, is forced to provide care herself – along with Matthew's grandma, Judy.

To support Pennsylvanians like the Jennings family, Governor Shapiro [proposed](#) **\$483 million** in federal and state funding to provide more resources for home and community-based service providers so they can increase the average starting salary from approximately \$15/hour to \$17/hour ensuring they are able to pay competitive rates to attract and retain the qualified staff who provide these essential services. The Governor's proposal also outlines a plan to eliminate the emergency waiting list for services for adults and reduce barriers to care for thousands of Pennsylvanians over the next several years.

Last year, Governor Shapiro [announced](#) that DHS would conduct an early review of reimbursement rates to better support ID/A service providers and the direct support professionals who help Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities and autism. Typically, reimbursement rates are readjusted every three years, but Governor Shapiro ordered an early review to address critical workforce shortages among service

providers. The Governor's budget proposal would fund the entirety of this rate increase and support recruitment, retention, and higher wages for direct support professionals who enhance opportunities for inclusive, enriching lives for people with intellectual disabilities and autism.

Governor Shapiro has been [traveling the Commonwealth](#) to have meaningful conversations with Pennsylvanians with ID/A and hear why the proposed investments in the 2024-25 budget are important and significantly needed. Earlier this month, Governor Shapiro and Secretary Arkoosh [hosted](#) a roundtable at BARC Developmental Services in Warminster, and Secretary Arkoosh has visited The Arc of Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

"I am so proud to lend my support to Governor Shapiro as we fight for freedom, care, and dignity for Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities and autism," said **Senator Jay Costa**. "This community needs real action to empower caregivers, expand available programming, and deliver the best services possible. I look forward to ensuring that the 2024-25 budget does right by our Commonwealth's ID/A residents and those who care for them."

The Governor's proposal also outlines a plan to eliminate the emergency waiting list for services for adults and reduce barriers to care for thousands of Pennsylvanians over the next several years. The proposal includes a **\$78 million** investment in federal and state funds to serve an additional 1,500 Pennsylvanians with ID/A currently on the waitlist in the next fiscal year. This comes after the Governor's [2023-24 budget](#) secured **\$17.49 million** to help an additional 850 Pennsylvanians with ID/A get off waitlists for home and community-based services.

"As someone with a background in the intellectual and developmental disability world, as well as an Autistic person myself, I'm grateful for Governor Shapiro's attention to the issues our community faces," said **Representative Jessica Benham**. "I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that workers in all care fields receive livable wages and benefits and particularly appreciate his commitment demonstrated here to DSP wages."

"Our direct support professionals are a key part of our workforce and help contribute to a successful economy in this Commonwealth. They should not have to choose between working in such a critical helping profession or being financially stable," said **Representative Aerion Abney**. "This investment is designed to address that false choice, creating a win for the workers, those they serve, and the greater good of our society".

Achieva serves individuals with disabilities in Western Pennsylvania – specifically in Erie, Beaver, Allegheny, Westmoreland, Cameron, Elk, Jefferson, Clarion, Clearfield, Butler, Lawrence, and Washington counties – through community supported living, early intervention, employment supports, home and community supports, and advocacy and family supports.

“Governor Shapiro’s budget proposal is so vitally important – it includes a significant investment into the intellectual disability and autism service system that we are a part of: \$217 million in state funds which will draw down an additional \$266 million in federal funds – that’s a total of \$483 million in total investment in the current ID/A system, and it couldn’t come at a better time,” said **Stephen Suroviec, President and CEO of Achieva**. “We’ve only had one rate increase in seven years. Organizations like Achieva are running deficits as we speak and we’re having a very challenging time attracting and keeping direct support professionals because we can’t pay them as much as they deserve. That’s led to DSP turnover rates and vacancy rates that are unacceptably high. On behalf of Achieva, we are so very much appreciative of the Governor’s budget. Governor Shapiro has made people with ID/A a budget priority and we thank him for his leadership – now we just need the General Assembly to pass the Governor’s proposed ID/A budget intact.”

“As a direct support professional (DSP) and advocate, I witness the critical need for home and community-based services and the care and supports provided. Unfortunately, this essential workforce is struggling due to inadequate compensation and funding. DSPs, who provide vital supports, are not being paid a livable wage. Competitive pay and robust reimbursement for DSP services must be prioritized to attract and retain talented and invested caregivers,” **Erin Grimes, direct support professional at Achieva**. “By adequately compensating DSPs, we can ensure that everyone has access to the care and support they need to thrive in their homes and communities. Let us come together to advocate for change, demanding the recognition and support that DSPs rightfully deserve. The time for action is now.”

“In 2008, I became a member of Achieva. I was a struggling individual who could not find the supports I needed when it came to having a DSP who was not available to care for my needs, so I understand the struggles for other individuals,” said **Christy Wechtenhiser**. “In 2011 a DSP named Crystal and in 2013 a DSP named Erin became my support systems when I couldn’t get the support I needed today. I have a I have a job coach and caseworkers who are able to give me funding to support me as an individual with special needs so I can grow into the adult I need to be.”

“I am Sierra Wechtenhiser and I am supported by Achieva. Erin started out as my friend before she became my direct support professional. Erin means a lot to me. DSPs are supportive, respectful, good listeners, kind, and very understanding. Erin and I took the time to get to know each other – and it was exciting to learn how much we have in common,” said **Sierra Wechtenhiser**. “I am a founding member of a healthy relationship peer group. I have advocated for my friends. We have a very strong trust with each other. I am here today to speak for people who are not able to be here and speak for themselves.”

Governor Shapiro’s 2024-25 proposed budget investments in ID/A services and direct support professionals have [received praise](#) from [advocates](#), [editorial boards](#), and [caregivers](#) across Pennsylvania.

For more information about the Governor's proposed 2024-25 budget and the bold investments to support Pennsylvania's ID/A community, programs, support staff, and more, click [here](#).

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