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*Serving Children and Adults with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities for over 70 Years*

January 21, 2022

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Dear Individuals, Families, and AHRC Suffolk Team Members:

Kerri Neifeld began her position as Acting Commissioner of the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities in November 2021. In the two short months since being appointed by Governor Hochul, there have been positive signs in her messaging and actions that indicate her commitment to support our field. Commissioner Neifeld recognizes the workforce crisis our agencies are facing and has conveyed the importance of not only growing the workforce, but also recognizing and appreciating those staff members who are the backbones of our industry, most notably so far through the planned distribution of critical eFMAP funding to Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

Today it was a privilege to join Acting Commissioner Neifeld on The Nonprofit Voice radio show to discuss the complex challenges our field is facing, and to hear the plans and vision she has to move OPWDD forward. The show, which will air tomorrow at 8:00am on 103.9FM, will also be linked to our [Facebook page](#) and our [website](#). I encourage you all to listen when you have a moment, to understand that the needs and concerns of individuals, families and staff are being recognized. I was honored to be joined on the program by our very own Lorraine Roalef, a Lead Community Integration Specialist at our Westhampton Beach location in Program Without Walls (PWW). Lorraine was recently presented with a Direct Service Professionals Excellence Award by Community Care Rx for her creativity and resourcefulness in finding meaningful and fulfilling volunteer and work community connections for the individuals in our PWW program and for facilitating engaging programming. Lorraine's exceptional work has not only been transformational for the individuals AHRC Suffolk supports, but she is helping improve perceptions in the community of our participants one heart and mind at a time. *#InItTogether*

Governor Hochul's proposed annual budget is also very promising to our field in a timely and critical manner we have not witnessed lately. The unintended consequences of a statewide minimum wage increase has driven many of our staff positions to minimum wage jobs, which they never were and never should be. The roles of our DSPs require far too much responsibility, are far too technical, and are too important to be considered minimum wage positions. They deserve so much more! The proposed budget could provide real hope for across the board agency Cost Of Living Adjustments that are well-deserved and long overdue. The newly proposed budget makes commitments to investing in our field and shows an alignment of support and backing that gives us great hope for the future.

Stay well, stay safe and thank you for all you do,



Paul H. Torres  
Chief Executive Officer

