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New York Association on Independent Living's Testimony for Joint Legislative Housing Budget Hearing on 2015-16 Executive Budget Proposal

The New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) is a membership organization which represents people with disabilities and Independent Living Centers across New York State, which collectively serve over 87,000 people with disabilities a year. NYAIL is dedicated to the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of community life. NYAIL would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the housing budget hearing and would like to take the opportunity to comment specifically on the Governor's proposed allocation of JPMorgan Chase settlement funds.

NYAIL is pleased Governor Cuomo is committing nearly \$440 million to fund housing programs, including for vulnerable populations. However, there are some major gaps in the proposed allocation plan. The lack of affordable, accessible, integrated housing is the most significant barrier to people with disabilities and older adults living independently in the community. New York's Olmstead implementation efforts can't be successful unless the lack of housing options for people with all disabilities is addressed. The Medicaid Redesign Team's Affordable Housing Workgroup, which NYAIL is a member of, has made progress towards addressing this issue, but more work needs to be done. These settlement funds present that opportunity. NYAIL specifically urges the adoption of the following strategies as part of the JP Morgan Chase allocation plan to increase affordable, accessible and integrated housing and support the Governor's Olmstead commitment of reducing the long-stay nursing home facility population by 10 percent over the next five years.

1. **A portion of these funds should go toward funding Access to Home.** The proposed plan currently earmarks \$19.6 million for Veterans to get home modifications through their own Access to Home program. While NYAIL supports this, it sets up a huge inequity as the rest of the Access to Home program is merely being funded with a \$1 million re-appropriation,

which is woefully insufficient to meet the needs of the community. In the 2012-2013 budget, this program was reduced by 75% and has yet to be brought up to its previous funding level of \$4 million, which had already proved inadequate to meet the demand.

Access to Home is a successful program administered by NYS Homes and Community renewal that provides funding for home modifications to allow individuals with disabilities and older New Yorkers to stay in their homes and out of costly institutions. For many people, the addition of a ramp to their front door makes the difference between being able to leave the house and being homebound. As people continue to transition back into the community, the need for accessible housing will only increase. The Medicaid Redesign Team's Affordable Housing workgroup acknowledged the crucial role this program plays and committed to additional modest funds through the supportive housing allocation fund last year, but it is still severely underfunded. Governor Cuomo should use funds from the JP Morgan Chase settlement to adequately fund Access to Home for all people with disabilities.

2. **Increase access to housing rental subsidies for people with disabilities who are institutionalized or at risk of unnecessary institutionalization due to the lack of affordable, accessible, integrated housing.** The proposed allocation plan commits approximately \$166 million towards increasing existing supportive housing programs targeted towards seniors, veterans, victims of domestic violence, formerly incarcerated and homeless. The concern is this funds an existing housing model, targeted towards specific populations, that has services attached, which for many people with disabilities is not the most integrated setting and not the type of housing and services they would choose. There are many people with physical disabilities living in institutions strictly due to the lack of housing that could transition if provided a housing subsidy.

New York should use funding from the JP Morgan settlement to support a housing subsidy program for people with disabilities who are institutionalized or at risk of unnecessary institutionalization due to lack of affordable, accessible, and integrated housing. The MRT Affordable Housing workgroup committed \$6 million in the two year 2014-16 allocation plan for an Olmstead housing subsidy program with the same goal, but program implementation is still underway.

3. **NYAIL supports funding for the Residential Emergency Services to Offer (Home) Repairs to the Elderly (RESTORE) program, and recommends additional funding be added to expand eligibility to people with disabilities.** RESTORE program funds pay for the cost of emergency repairs to eliminate hazardous conditions in homes owned by older New Yorkers when the homeowner cannot afford to make the repairs in a timely fashion. Eligibility is currently limited to homeowners 60 years of age or older who have a household income not exceeding 80 percent of the area median income. New York should support additional funding for the RESTORE program and expand eligibility to include people with disabilities in need of home repairs to ensure older New Yorkers and people with disabilities can maintain full independence in their community.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide our recommendations on how the JPMorgan Chase settlement funds should be allocated in the 2015-16 SFY budget.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lindsay Miller
Executive Director