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The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Services for People with Developmental Disabilities

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am writing to you as a friend of a person with developmental disabilities to urge you to preserve the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) (formerly OMRDD) and the critical services that my friend and others with developmental disabilities rely on every hour of every day. These services have dramatically improved the life of my friend and others and have made New York State the national leader in services for people with developmental disabilities.

Three decades ago, in an effort to end institutionalization, New York State created separate state offices that addressed the unique challenges that faced the different constituencies within the Department of Mental Hygiene. In today's critical times, we need the expertise of OPWDD, the individual agency that designs and regulates unique services that maximize financial resources. Families fought for this distinct representation for people with developmental disabilities and now they fear that, if OPWDD were consolidated with one or more agencies, the "voice" of my friend and others with developmental disabilities will be drowned out, and their unique, complex needs will go unmet.

OPWDD services have already been cut to the bone and cannot withstand additional substantial cuts. Nevertheless, I understand that efficiencies are imperative in the face of enormous fiscal challenge. I believe that some efficiencies can be taken in all of state government. However, because my friend and others with developmental disabilities rely on OPWDD's services every day, it is imperative that any steps within OPWDD be taken by those with the knowledge and expertise to do so without harming the vulnerable individuals who rely on OPWDD services. We must preserve OPWDD's independent role in affecting change in ways that will do no harm.

On behalf of the 130,000 people with developmental disabilities receiving services and their family members and friends, as well as those who will need services in the future, I ask that you preserve the system that sustains them and enhances their lives and that has the ability to guide them through these challenging times and into the future.

Sincerely,