



ANGELO SANTABARBARA
Assemblyman 111th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Subcommittee on Autism
Spectrum Disorders
COMMITTEES
Agriculture
Energy
Governmental Employees
Mental Health
Racing and Wagering
Veterans' Affairs

August 21st, 2020

The Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor, State of New York
State Capitol Building
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I write with concern regarding the Home and Community Based Services Waiver Self-direction program. Under the program, current restrictions will cause hardships for many families that would normally send their child to school but feel they can no longer do so safely.

Current restrictions only allow important supports and services to be accessed outside of normal school hours. Under normal circumstances this structure has not been a significant issue of concern; however, with schools set to open in a few weeks, not all students are able to return for in-person education. This includes those with health conditions that put them at greater risk for COVID-19 and those with developmental disabilities who may not be able to meet social distancing and face mask requirements.

We've all made enormous sacrifices during these difficult times, however the needs of special education students must not be forgotten. Since COVID-19, high needs special education kids, including students who are deaf or hard of hearing, students who have visual impairments, students who have multiple disabilities and some that cannot use computers independently have simply not been able to receive the supports and services outlined in their individualized education or medical plans; New York State is required to provide these services even under these circumstances. Consequently, much of this population is now seeing regression and loss of valuable skills needed for independence.

As it stands, these families will now be forced to care for and provide an education for their children during the school day without access to the supports and services they are entitled to. Under the current circumstances, I ask that you make the necessary changes that would allow these families to access these support services during the school day. This 'temporary relief' from these restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic will allow many families to go back to work and for their loved ones to be safe and cared for.

These programs are important as they can help special education students regain much of what they have lost during COVID-19. They are also an essential source of support for families and their loved ones, providing reliable care, therapeutic and health services, educational activities and social interaction. Please do all you can to provide the flexibility needed to serve the educational needs of this population.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angelo Santabarbara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Angelo" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Santabarbara".

Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara

Assembly Chair of the Sub-Committee on Autism Spectrum Disorders