



2900 Veterans Memorial Highway • Bohemia, NY 11716
P: (631) 585-0100
F: (631) 585-0233
Email: Info@suffahrc.org
Web: www.ahrcsuffolk.org

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

July 23, 2021

PAUL H. TORRES
Chief Executive Officer

JOHN MCGUIGAN
Chief Operating Officer

CHRISTOPHER VEROS
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Deborah Pflieger

Dear Individuals, Families, and AHRC Suffolk Team Members:

I have spoken in past updates about recognizing the serious salary disparities facing our valued staff, and our Board and leadership team made a commitment to prioritizing and addressing the issue. Salary changes are inherently tied to our rates as an agency and the success and participation in our programs. Other than restricted cost of living allowances (COLAs) over the last few years, OPWDD has not enhanced rates to allow AHRC Suffolk to afford raises. As of July 3, almost all AHRC Suffolk staff received at least a \$0.75 per hour cost of living allowance raise that represents between a 2 to 5% raise for the vast majority of staff. We have heard very happy and positive feedback from this small step, and we continue to seek all ways to continue to let our staff know their true value. As discussed last week, we also continue to monitor the NYS Department of Health spending plan as it pertains to targeted funding for DSPs and direct care employees.

We need your help advocating for our staff members! Congress has introduced the Better Care Better Jobs Act. This bill includes a long-overdue investment in the disability service system as part of a COVID-19 economic recovery to support care for Medicaid recipients and create more and better jobs for the workforce that provides that care. We must all ask Members of Congress to enact legislation that lives up to this plan and do more for people with disabilities, their families, and the direct care workforce. This plan addresses the direct care workforce crisis, including raising wages. Our Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) deserve the proper living wages and the salaries in the intellectual and developmental disabilities field currently lag statewide compared to similar social services fields. Our assertion is that our workforce deserves at least a \$3 to \$4 an hour raise before we would consider it a living wage and we will not be satisfied until we can achieve that. Click [HERE](#) for a quick and easy way to contact your legislators and fight for our DSPs.

We are hiring! We continue to face challenges in recruiting and retaining DSPs. Our DSPs are vital partners in the daily successes individuals achieve and are instrumental to our agency's successes. Statewide staffing shortages have grown worse for many years due to inadequate funding. If you know of anyone looking for a rewarding career, there is a time limited generous referral bonus for permanent staff referring new team members, and I encourage families to think of anyone who would be a great fit for a position with us. We have also initiated a time-limited retention bonus for new hires to help in our recruitment process. Job postings can be found [HERE](#). Please help us spread the word! #InItTogether

Most recent known information has our Chapter staff vaccination rate at 45%, 42% among DSPs. A recent report from OPWDD measures the statewide vaccination rate among DSPs at just under 39%. The percentage of fully vaccinated recipients in Suffolk County is currently 57% and 69% for those 18 and older. We have always taken a point of pride in not merely being average, but being exceptional at AHRC Suffolk in all manners. Leadership commits to renewing efforts to obtain more up to date and accurate verification of vaccination among staff and coupled with OPWDD's targeted vaccination bonus and our own agency-wide incentive plan, hope to see an increase in our community saturation. That would give us greater confidence in safely embracing the new COVID guidance relaxing mask wearing and social distancing. Our greatest hesitancy in taking these next steps is the risk of an outbreak that could compromise the health and wellbeing of our individuals and staff, and would devastate our staffing patterns, putting program coverage at risk.

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

Paul H. Torres
Chief Executive Officer

A chapter of 
The Arc
New York
Strangers Together!

NEW STAFF NEEDED! Join the AHRC Suffolk Team! Visit www.ahrcsuffolk.org/careers to see our current openings at various day program and residential locations. Apply today!

BECOME A MEMBER! 2021 Memberships are available! Help make our collective voice stronger. Visit www.ahrcsuffolk.org/membership today!

DONATE TO OUR COVID-19 FUND! Our expenses continue to mount each day for PPE, cleaning supplies and extraordinary pay. Please click [HERE](#) to donate today!
