

CAPITAL VIEW - ACCSES NJ

October 2005

Funding Add-On Pursued

Despite a good measure of success with this year's New Jersey State budget, ACCSES New Jersey is seeking a Supplemental Appropriation to produce more funds for Supported Employment Long-Term Follow-Along services.

The budget for Fiscal Year 2006, signed into law by Acting Governor Richard Codey in early July, included \$1 million in additional Supported Employment funding, to be used for both intensive Supported Employment (SE) job placement and Long-Term Follow-Along (LTFA), which provides job retention services for employees with severe disabilities. Unfortunately, this is far short of what is needed to meet current demands. ACCSES NJ will ask the legislature to enact a supplemental appropriation of \$4 million to meet critical needs and will seek the Governor's support for the initiative. We are aiming for a vote on the funding when the Legislature reconvenes after the November 8th elections for Governor and all 80 seats in the General Assembly.

The population eligible for our members' SE services is increasing but the funding has been frozen over an extended period. The small increase approved by Acting Governor Codey and the legislature in July was the only one the program has received in six years. Also, our providers are being reimbursed at a rate far below what it costs them to provide the services, between \$80 and \$90 an hour. The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) currently pays only \$44 per hour for SE LTFA, and \$51 an hour for intensive SE services. We need an increase to at least the \$51 rate.

Supported Employment provides jobs in a competitive workplace. The employer pays the wages and the SE funds provide support from a job coach or mentor, who helps participants develop the skills needed to retain jobs and advance their careers.

ACCSES NJ and its members maintained a high profile in this year's budget negotiations, as we have the past several years. While recognizing New Jersey's continuing financial difficulties, we strongly advanced the line of reasoning that government funds allocated to our programs are an investment that will ultimately save the state money. We presented this case in testimony before the legislative budget and appropriations committees and in communications to the Legislature, the Governor, the Commissioners of the Departments of Labor and Workforce Development and Human Services, and other executive branch officials.

Apart from Supported Employment, our efforts helped ensure that the Extended Employment (EE) budget for people with disabilities was maintained at \$18.871 million, as recommended by Acting Governor Codey. In addition, the legislature passed a one percent COLA for EE and a 1.5 percent COLA for Human Service contracts.

Another notable increase is the \$400,000 in new funding for Sheltered Workshop Transportation to help workers with disabilities pay for their transportation costs. The budget specifically allocates the increase to ACCSES New Jersey/CNA Services for reimbursement of transportation costs.

Without this funding for people with disabilities, many of those we serve would have lost their jobs, leaving them with bleak alternatives such as being confined to their homes, losing their paychecks and their productivity, or even being institutionalized or placed in programs that are two to three times more expensive. We are grateful to Acting Governor Codey, Commissioners Carver and Davy, and members of the Legislature for recognizing and acting on these critical needs.