Dear Congressperson \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

My name is [Insert Name] and I am your constituent. My (son/daughter/brother/sister/friend) is a person with a developmental disability who relies on the supports and services provided through the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and its voluntary provider network. I know you have supported us in the past with visits, well-wishing, and advocacy. For that I am very appreciative. Given this history, I am confident you will continue to aid New York State’s community of individuals and families whose lives are touched by intellectual and developmental disability (I/DD) during this very difficult time.

We are all deeply impacted in a way that could wash away decades of progress in only a few short months, from highly skilled direct support services, to the quality of life and livelihood for individuals and families who are affected by this pandemic. While there have been trillions of dollars directed toward other interests, we have not been given the same consideration. To that end, I ask that you be a strong, representative voice for us and support the following provisions, many of which are included in the recently released Heroes Act.

First and foremost, unrestricted federal aid for New York State and its local governments is needed just to maintain our current level of supports. Over the years, New Yorkers have paid into the federal system to benefit other states more than we have received in return, which we do not begrudge. However, in order to support others into the future, we need aid right now in real and tangible ways.

Funding and access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Direct Support Professionals (DSP) is vital, especially given the high exposure nature of their job. Unfortunately, the same opportunities afforded other healthcare institutions to obtain PPE at lower costs are not available for ours. This is despite our frontline workers facing similar, if not greater challenges in protecting themselves and the individuals they support. Please be sure to address this inequity for non-profit providers. Our DSPs deserve the same level of respect and recognition as others in the healthcare field, including any pandemic hazard pay for essential workers allocated through the HEROES Act.

Additionally, most community day programs have had to completely close, which increases the need for in-home supports. Targeted Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) grants, or other means of funding, will aid in the continuation and expansion of services provided in the most integrated settings possible. I cannot stress enough how critical this need is. Failure to fund HCBS would critically damage and erase years of advancements in providing community-based services to people with I/DD and exacerbate already lengthy waiting lists. Any final legislation must include HCBS.

I hope you know that these are needs and not a list of wants. I’m asking you to be a part in preserving the dignity of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the Direct Support Professionals, who have demonstrated great courage, kindness, strength, and humanity throughout this crisis. Now is the time to honor the promise.

Sincerely,

Insert Name