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Public Hearing Testimony
NYS 2008-2009 State Budget
November 29, 2007
Brooklyn Borough Hall
Submitted by Mike Godino
Director of Advocacy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the 2008-2009 NYS Budget during its preparation. This is a very different process from what we have experienced in the past. The Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled (BCID) commends the Governor for his commitment to include the citizens in this critical aspect of government's function.

As the speaker's time was closed out I was unable to register. However, I submit this written testimony on behalf of the Board, Staff and Members of the Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled (BCID). BCID is a not-for profit community based, consumer directed center, which advocates on behalf of the disabled community and provides services to promote independence and community participation.

First, being an independent living center, it is incumbent on BCID to request greater funding be provided to all independent living centers. Although the NYS independent living movement received a modest increase last year, we find that more and more people are turning to the IL movement for many of the tasks that were one time preformed by the shrinking governmental offices. Looking to the private industry and foundations we have found that these resources provide less then three percent of their funds to

organizations serving people with disabilities: greater than twenty percent of the population. Given the tremendous strides in health care more people with disabilities are finding the strength and confidence to participate in life and the IL movement is where their regeneration begins. We need this coming budget to begin to close the gap in funding for the IL movement in New York so that we can continue to expand to meet the growing needs of the community at large.

Next, in this time of the sub-prime mortgage debacle when people with well paying job find themselves in foreclosure or homeless, we at BCID stand fast in our position that there are many people struggling every day without an affordable place to live. People with disabilities consist of the largest population having the least amount of assets and resources. People with disabilities are seventy to seventy-five percent unemployed or underemployed. The current SSI benefit is less than seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750.00) per month. The average SSDI benefit is not more than one thousand dollars (\$1000.00) per month. It is not humanly possible to maintain a respectable residency in NY City with these low rates of income. BCID would like to see a greater amount in the budget for housing, housing resources and housing subsidies for the people with disabilities at the lower end of the income spectrum.

On the campaign trail, the governor talked a great deal about "people first". BCID has worked long and hard to see that people are truly first in our efforts to see the implementation of the most integrated setting legislation and the passage of the Transition and Diversion Waiver. We are currently active on Capital Hill working

toward the passage of the Community Choice Act; however, all these efforts providing greater independence for people with disabilities in the community need resources. BCID needs to know the good work we do will continue to have the community based services to maintain the current levels and expand. We need the Governor to end the institutional bias and to begin providing the necessary resources to people who want to remain in the community and keep their independence.

Finally, there is the matter of the wasted resources on an appointed Executive Board that will meet for two years to discuss the services being provided to New Yorkers who are blind. The money being spent on the research would be better spent on services. It is well known that NYS Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped is mostly funded through RSA with a small percentage providing non vocational services. Just last year, this Governor signed a bill moving the senior vision services into the office of SOFA yet, he has not funded the office to provide those services. This budget should provide a minimum of \$2 Million to the office of SOFA to provide the vision services to seniors. Additionally this budget should be providing up to ten Million dollars (\$10 Million) in funding the much needed non vocational services to people who are blind through NYS CBVH.

Again BCID thanks the Governor for his incite and commitments to see the people of New York are truly represented.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mike Godino
Director of Advocacy, BCID