**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: CONTACT:**

June 4, 2021 Ashley Hirtzel, Cantalician Center

ahirtzel@cantalician.org

Cell: 716.863.0919

**THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ALLIANCE OF WNY AND A COALITION OF 853 SCHOOLS AND 4410 PRESCHOOLS URGE STATE TO OFFER FAIR AND EQUITABLE FUNDING TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AS OFFERED TO PEERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Buffalo, NY**— The Enacted FY2020 New York State Budget included a 7.6 percent increase in Foundation Aid for public schools. As a result, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) sought approval from the New York State Division of Budget (NYS DOB) for a 7 percent rate increase in funding of schools for children with disabilities. NYS DOB has authorized NYSED to only provide a 4 percent increase in funding to schools serving children with disabilities. Local schools for children with special needs (Aspire of WNY, Autism Services, Inc., Bornhava, Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center, Cantalician Center for Learning, Inc., CHC Learning Center, Gateway Longview, OLV Human Services, The Summit Center, Wee Can Preschool & Childcare, The Children’s League, and the Arc of Erie County New York), many known as members of the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY) or part of a coalition of agencies operating 853/4410 schools are asking for the approval of a 7 percent increase to provide services to children whose home school districts have determined their needs exceed the capabilities of public districts. The increase would be a fair and equitable decision to ensure that students in 853 schools and 4410 preschools receive parity with their peers in public schools. It would allow for schools to hire educators and therapists at a fair wage and improve the quality of education for children with special needs in those schools. The coalition of 853/4410 organizations is in support of proposed legislation (S.6516) that has been introduced in the New York State Legislature that would create parity and equity with public school districts.

The amount an 853 school and 4410 preschool receives per student/per day is their tuition rate. The cost of tuition is calculated by the "tuition rate methodology." The methodology is recommended by NYSED annually and approved by the NYS DOB. The tuition rate methodology is a cost based formula that does not adequately keep pace with the actual real time costs of providing the critical services that are required under a child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP).

“While we applaud the New York State Education Department’s intention to seek additional funding to provide our schools with parity with public school state aid increases, current legislation does not go far enough to support special education programs that support public school students,” says Douglas DiGesare, CEO of The Arc Erie County New York which supports over 250 students through its 4410 and 853 school programs. “We are asking that Special Education Schools are provided funding equity with the same 7 percent increase to tuition rates this year in parity with the general education state aid increase and that future increases mirror the state aid increases the public school districts receive.”

“The Legislature passed an historic increase in education funding in this past budget in order to provide every student in New York with a high-quality education. Public schools received an historic 7.6 percent increase in funding, and it is only fair and appropriate that 4410 and 853 schools receive a comparable increase,” said Assemblymember Monica Wallace. “These schools teach some of the most vulnerable and high-needs students in our community, and it is unconscionable to shortchange them. We call upon the Division of Budget to reverse its decision and increase funding for special education schools and preschools so that all students in New York have an equal opportunity to succeed.”

853 schools and 4410 preschools are educational programs that are dedicated to improving the opportunities and outcomes for students enrolled. The schools largely serve school aged and/or preschool children involved in the foster care, juvenile justice, and special education systems. DDAWNY speaks on behalf of a broad spectrum of special education students enrolled in our member agency schools – from those with emotional/behavioral issues to those with developmental challenges – by advocating, assisting and representing the schools which support and educate them.

“Access to a good and high-quality education empowers students to develop the foundational skills and resulting confidence to build a promising future,” said Assembly Majority Leader Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes. “It is critical that we invest funding for special education programs that are fair and equitable to public school districts. I applaud DDAWNY for their efforts to improving the quality of education for children with special needs.”

“High-quality education is critical for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities to fulfill short- and long-term outcomes,” said Rhonda Frederick, president of Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York. “Adequate funding is needed in order for quality education to be provided to help shape the future for children with special needs, working parents and caregivers, as well as for the economy. This is why it is crucial that the New York State Division of Budget revisit this issue and approve a rate increase for 853/4410 schools that is on par with the rate that is proposed for public schools.”

# # #

The Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY) is a collaborative group of member voluntary agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities. While honoring individual agency missions, it is the intent of the Alliance to assist agencies to develop relationships, promote unified strategies and share risks for the mutual gain with and for the benefit of people with developmental disabilities. More information about DDAWNY can be found at DDAWNY.org.