

Advocates for developmentally disabled push for more funding

By Kassie Parisi 3:53 p.m. | Mar. 16, 2016

ALBANY — ALBANY — Organizations that serve developmentally disabled New Yorkers [returned](#) to the Capitol on Wednesday to push the Legislature for an increase in funding that would allow them to raise wages without putting the already suffering sector under further strain.

With the April 1 budget deadline fast approaching, advocates, who support Gov. Andrew Cuomo's \$15 minimum wage proposal, are worried the wage hike will force them to either scale back on staff or scale back on programs they offer to the developmentally disabled.

"The state has cut back on the money they spend on support for people with developmental disabilities in so many ways, there is no money left for us to give these increases," Steven Kroll, the executive director of NYSARC said at a press conference Wednesday.

In its one-house budget, the Assembly allocated \$200 million to the mental health sector to offset labor costs related to the first year of the minimum wage increase, but Kroll said the groups were not the only providers pushing for funding, and that the Assembly hasn't specified how the money would be allocated.

"We know that for us, the year one cost would be \$270 million," Kroll said.

"We see ourselves in a situation where the state of New York has seemingly declared war on people with special needs," said Assemblyman Tom Abinanti. "Well, now we have a time to stand up and say we want to give people who help a fair wage. People are more important than hamburgers."

After a minimum wage rally Tuesday, Cuomo hinted that this sector might be facing a particularly tough road in its fight for funding.

"I went through a war with a lot of these not-for-profits where I wanted a \$200,000 income cap, and they wouldn't give me a \$2000,000 income cap for their employees. If they have employees making \$200,000 in income, they're going to have a tough case coming to me and arguing that they need money to now pay their employees a \$15 minimum wage," Cuomo said.

"That matter was addressed in the Governor's Executive Order 38 on non-profit compensation and we all comply with the order every year. It's red herring to distract from the real issue, which is adequately funding workers who care for people with developmental disabilities," said Michael Seereiter, President/CEO of New York State Rehabilitation Association, who worked on the executive order while working in the Cuomo administration.