**Appendix E: Legislative Update:**

**2023 Legislative Session Update**

**to the**

**Advisory Board for Persons Who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

**by Jennifer Proto, ADS Legislative Liaison**

**June 15, 2023**

**Service Animals**

1. **One bill, which revised the domestic animal laws, updates the term “guide dogs” with “service animals,” conforming with federal law. It also eliminates the requirement that the animal be readily identified as a service animal (sSB 1069, § 9).**
2. **The 2nd bill allows the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to establish a sea- and shorebird protection program along the state’s public coastal areas and makes it an infraction to disturb the areas from March to September. The bill exempts service animals from the requirement that a pet or other animal under a person’s control be kept from coming within 100 feet of an identified protection area (HB 6813).**

**Windshield Parking Placards**

**The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) bill makes some changes to windshield parking placards used by people with certain disabilities or blindness by updating their name from “parking permit for persons with disabilities” to “Accessibility Parking Permit.”**

**It also creates an Accessible Parking Advisory Council and charges it with developing a strategy to deter, detect, and prevent fraud and misuse related to these placards. The council consists of nine specified members, one of whom is appointed by the ADS Commissioner (sSB 994).**

**Resources and Support Services**

**A wide-ranging omnibus bill, HB 5001, that was primarily focused on persons with an intellectual or developmental disability, has several provisions that apply more broadly to people with physical disabilities. For instance, the bill:**

1. **establishes a Human Services Career Pipeline Program to ensure sufficient trained providers are available to serve the needs of residents who are elderly or have disabilities, ADS, along with several other agencies and advocacy organizations, will be consulting on this pipeline (§ 11)**
2. **requires the Department of Transportation and each transit district to jointly develop plans to modernize and maintain Connecticut’s bus stops and shelters to:**
   1. **ensure compliance with ADA’s guidelines;**
   2. **include sidewalks, appropriate curb cuts and ramps, shelter from weather conditions, and lighting and signage that give real-time transportation service information; and**
   3. **consider installing solar energy systems to operate the lights and allow the charging of mobile electronic devices (§ 22)**
3. **requires the DMV to create a video presentation that instructs and gives best practices on ways to appropriately interact with certain people with disabilities. Applicants for a public passenger license endorsement must then watch the video to obtain or renew their license (§ 25)**

**Numerous provisions in the bill pertain to special education, and particularly transition services as students prepare to leave the education system. For instance, the bill aligns state law with federal requirements for interpreters, including a registered interpreter for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, at PPT meetings and translated IEP documents to ensure student, parent, and guardian understanding (§ 39).**

**The bill requires ADS to employ enough vocational rehabilitation staff to provide transition services for students requiring special education, if determined that they may be eligible to receive services from ADS (§ 44).**

**The bill also increases the age up to which a court may issue support orders for adult children with certain disabilities, from up to age 21 to up to age 26 (§ 64).**

**Long-Term Care**

**A bill advocated for by the Long-Term Care Ombudsperson, requires nursing homes to notify her about a resident’s involuntary transfer or discharge on the same day the nursing home notifies the resident. Failure to do so invalidates the transfer or discharge.**

**The bill also establishes a dementia services coordinator within ADS to coordinate services across state agencies, assess and analyze dementia-related data collected by the state, evaluate state-funded dementia services, identify and support the development of dementia-specific training programs (HB 5781).**

**Highlights from the Budget Bill & Implementer**

**Beginning October 1, 2024, the biennium budget expands eligibility for HUSKY C, which provides Medicaid coverage to people who are age 65 or older, blind, or living with a disability, by raising the income limit from 143% of the TFA cash benefit to 105% of FPL, after any authorized income disregards. To put that into context, the HUSKY C monthly income limit is $700 for an individual and $946 for a two-person family. whereas under the bill it will be $1,276 per month for an individual and $1,725 for a two-person family (HB 6941, § 318).**

**The budget also:**

* **Allocates $2.25M in FY 24 from federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for Elderly Nutrition and appropriates an additional $1.5M for that program in FY 25**
* **Funds 10 service navigators (2 at each of the 5 Area Agencies on Aging)**
* **Carryforwards $150,000 for FY 24 to provide a grant to the Ellington Senior Center for replacing a bus**
* **Provides $100,000 in both FYs 24 & 25 for the Stamford senior center**
* **Provides $100,000 in FYs 24 & 25 for the Communication Advocacy Network for the hiring of an executive director**

**Study Bills & Working Groups**

**A few of proposals needed further research and policy development and so became a task force or working group:**

1. **to study and make recommendations concerning the elderly nutrition program. This includes a review of the (1) program eligibility requirements, (2) types of meals provided, (3) costs of meal prep and delivery, (4) comparing the number of program participants to the estimated number of people needing nutritional services, (5) looking at funding level adequacy, and (6) process for contracting with elderly nutrition providers (SB 1053)**
   1. **a representative from ADS is a designated taskforce member**
2. **to study minimum standards for the timely repair of motorized wheelchairs, including improving timelines for assessing and repairing them by a manufacturer or authorized service provider (HB 6855 as amended by LCO 9474)**
   1. **a representative from ADS, as well as several other state agencies, are designated taskforce members**
3. **concerning any revisions necessary to nursing home waiting list requirements**
   1. **the LTC Ombudsman and the Public Health and Social Services Commissioners, or their designees, are part of the working group (SB 989)**