



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services



Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Acting Commissioner

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

March 13, 2017

Senators Gerratana and Somers, Representatives Steinberg and Srinivasan and members of the Public Health Committee. I am Jordan A. Scheff, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Governor's bill **S.B. No. 796** AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF RESPECTFUL AND PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE.

The Department of Developmental Services has for the past several years worked to promote the use of person-first and respectful language in state statutes, agency regulations and in everyday communication. The department has worked collaboratively with self-advocates, advocacy groups, individuals and families, state agencies and the legislature to make these changes to promote inclusion and respect for any person who has a disability. When DDS developed and implemented our **"Respectful Language" policy** in 2010, not only did we hold our employees and providers to this standard, but we hoped to educate and inform other agencies, various stakeholders, the media and the public on the use of person-first and respectful language.

Last year, several advocates drew our attention to the use of terms such as "the handicapped" and "the disabled," which appear throughout state statute, though not in DDS statute. Specifically, DDS Self-Advocate Coordinators (SACs) unveiled a new initiative titled **"We are People-Call Me By My Name"**. As part of this initiative, the SACs are hoping to eliminate several words when referring to individuals with intellectual disability, including "client", "patient", "ward", "handicapped", and the "R" word- "retarded". DDS wishes to thank Governor Malloy for this proposed legislation, which as a result of his office's efforts to work with numerous state agencies to coordinate a review of state statutes, has produced a major revision of the general statutes to replace outdated and disrespectful language.

After reviewing all sections of the bill and the various ways state agencies have used terms for persons who have a disability, my staff and I have identified a few technical changes to the bill's current language to strengthen the "person-first" aspects of the bill. We will be working with administration to submit these changes to you for your review as soon as possible and respectfully request that you include them in substitute language.

I would like to express my thanks to the members of the Public Health Committee, past and present, who have supported our department's efforts to change the way persons with intellectual disability are referred to both in statute and in everyday life. Throughout this ongoing process,

your committee's membership have met with and encouraged our advocates to continue this transition to the use of respectful and appropriate terms throughout Connecticut statutes.

Thank you for your continued support of DDS and persons with intellectual disability in Connecticut. My staff and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have on [S.B. No. 796](#). Please contact Christine Pollio Cooney, DDS Director of Legislative and Executive Affairs, at (860) 418-6066 if you would like additional information from DDS.