

ABLE Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

2:00, February 16th, 2015

The Office of the State Treasurer, 7th Floor Conference Room

In Attendance

Rich D. Gray, Deputy Treasurer

Mary Phil Guinan, Asst. Treasurer, Policy

Melissa Marshall

Amy Porter, DRS

Marina Derman

Kevin Lawton, DDS

Kerry Tedford-Coles

Lisa Weisinger-Roland

Sharon Geanuracos, parent of a disabled child

Jack Frost, parent of a disabled child

Lisa Roland

Carrie Knowles

Marc Shok

Joe Shore

The meeting was called to order at 2:05.

Opening remarks were given by Richard D. Gray. He has spoken to OPM regarding a slot on the advisory committee and the likely ask of an appropriation of \$150,000 during the 2016 legislative session.

Mary Phil Guinan passed out the minutes from the last meeting and asked everyone to review them. After a break the minutes were approved.

Next, Mary Phil Guinan passed out a memo that outlined three different implementation strategies for CT's ABLE Act. These three strategies were discussed at length. It was noted that robust appropriations are not likely during the 2016 Legislative Session. However, the cheapest implementation strategy is highly flawed because the loss of control would likely mean a reduction in quality for CT residents.

Jack Frost noted the benefits of having Connecticut banks involved. The need for a feasibility study was made very clear by several members of the committee.

Richard Gray stated that we need a “voice at the table” in any kind of consortium we join moving forward. He does not want the policy decisions in another state to have consequences for CT residents.

Jack Frost stated that the “do nothing” plan might temporarily be the best option as other states roll out their plans. This would still leave open CT’s ability to run its own program in the future when larger appropriations might be more feasible.

Rich Gray noted that we might invite Kerry Alexander from TIAA-CREF to speak directly with the Advisory Committee about the progress in other states. Kerry works on CHET, but he is also involved in the ABLE plan development inside of TIAA-CREF.

Mary Phil Guinan discussed the possibility of our losing business if we implement the “do nothing strategy.” Jack Frost countered that CT’s plan might ultimately be stronger if we watch the mistakes of other states and avoid them in our own implementation.

Richard Gray noted that, without a baseline of data, we cannot negotiate with other states or vendors. The first step has to be a feasibility study to create a baseline of data.

It was widely agreed that we should seek out other funding sources for ABLE Implementation. We might need to augment a legislative appropriation with other funds, such as The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, ARC, or other foundations that advocate for the disabled. Several members pointed out that we will need to do a feasibility study regardless, so we could certainly start with that request. Amy Porter pointed out this might result in a “slowing down” of the process.

Melissa Marshall noted that, regardless of implementation strategy, we need to communicate with people quickly and effectively. We need to explain exactly where we are in the process of implementation and time frame until the act is fully implemented in CT.

It was agreed that we should ask the legislature for a \$150,000 appropriation this session to create a feasibility study. In the meantime, we will begin the process of researching implementation plans in other states.

The next meeting date will be set once we determine the availability of Kerry Alexander.

Discussion turned to the SSA POMS. There is widespread agreement in the committee that the regulations are fairly onerous for a community of people who may struggle to adhere to all of the rules. Between SSI and Medicaid the benefits are subject to different rules in terms of savings and income. We need to be sure these rules are made as clear and simple as possible.

Several families have called into The Treasury expressing dismay at the beneficiary controlling all of the funds in a given ABLE account. A discussion of possible safe guards ensued. True Link Cards were mentioned as one good example of a financial product that allows for flexible control, but that amount of flexibility would likely be quite expensive.

When the \$150,000 appropriation is considered, the committee is going to work to get a lot of people with disabilities and their advocates to come to the Capitol and testify to the importance of ABLE.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50.