

**DDS North Region**  
**Regional Advisory Council**

March 19, 2025

Meeting Minutes – Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams (meeting was recorded)

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Members Present: Susan Prihar, Rick Rothstein, Annette Scully, Tammy Selinger, and Stacie Silva, DDS North Regional Director (ex-Officio member).

Members Absent: Donna Cohen, Cindy Lichtsteiner, Kim Little, Chairperson, Ellyn Little, Kathleen Hayes, Mary Lou O'Connor, Adrianna Ramirez, and Lori Sandora.

Guests: Mari Patricia DeCarlo, DDS Director of Workforce Strategies

- Call to Order

Kim Little, Chairperson was not in attendance; the meeting was convened by Annette Scully. Ms. Scully called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

- Approval of Minutes – February 19, 2025

Motion to accept the minutes of the February 19, 2025 RAC meeting as presented.

The motion was made by Tammy Selinger and seconded by Dawn Frey.

The motion carried unanimously.

- Presentations: Workforce

Ms. Mary Patricia DeCarlo, DDS Director of Workforce Strategies was in attendance this evening to give an update following her last presentation at a previous RAC meeting. Ms. DeCarlo shared the screen with a PowerPoint presentation about workforce (see Exhibit A). Ms. Susan Prihar commented to Ms. DeCarlo that she has done a very thoughtful plan for how to encourage more people to consider becoming direct care workers. She asked Ms. DeCarlo how she is going to encourage providers to open additional homes for the higher level of need people. There's over 100 beds open available right now, but nobody wants a high level of need individual, said Ms. Prihar. Ms. DeCarlo responded that she is the Chairperson of a committee regarding intensive need individuals and what can be done to assist. The providers still want to work with people with intense needs, but without the staff they can't safely provide the service that is required. Dawn Frey, Assistant Regional Director, commented that she understands the turnover and retention of staff. One of the things that could come out of the standardized training program, is that some of the providers could save dollars in the cost of advertising and training to bring new staff on board; the additional funds might be able to help increase wages. Ms. DeCarlo agreed and added that when she was a provider and they looked on average, it cost about \$2800 to onboard a new staff for providers. Yes, that would be great money to turn around and be able to put it into wages. Ms. DeCarlo concluded her presentation.

- Regional Director's Update – Stacie Silva

Regional Director, Stacie Silva thanked Ms. Mary Pat for her presentation this evening and the information that she shared. Ms. Silva also expressed her appreciation to the members of the RAC for being engaged; she's been seeing some of the members testify at the State Capitol and appreciate their advocacy that they do for the individuals and for DDS.

Director Silva reported the following:

- There's been some discussion of a possible strike. DDS hasn't received any definitive dates; however, they are trying to keep communications open with the agencies. The main concern that providers have discussed is the House Bill 6904 about unemployment that could be provided for striking workers.

- In the paper there was an article about the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) hiring freeze and there's no timeline of when that will end. As far as refilling of vacant positions, they will have to be approved through OPM for critical circumstances. Ms. Silva explained that she will be asking for approval for positions that are critical in the North Region. The Resource allocation team coordinator position is vacant and the Secretary position for that division is also vacant.
- Ms. Silva went to visit 12 homes in the Public Division that are assigned to her as of February 21, 2025. She has about 5 more homes to visit. Ms. Annette Scully asked if there were any openings in the homes that she visited. Couple of houses had openings due to recent individuals passing away or moving to a different location, said Ms. Silva. Is that information posted on the website, asked Ms. Scully. No, the vacancies are not posted anywhere, said Ms. Silva and explained that she's currently in the process of visiting the homes, taking notes of how the homes are run, and taking inventory of capacity. Ms. Silva can provide an update in a future meeting once she finishes visiting the homes.
- OPM approved for DDS to post the Request for Proposal for new group homes for age out individuals. It's supposed to be three homes per region, said Ms. Silva.
- The DDS Management information report for December 2024 is posted on the DDS website; that report provides information to staff and stakeholders about eligibility and the services that DDS is providing. All backdated reports are also available on the website for review.

- **Legislative Update**

Mr. Rick Rothstein on the following list of legislature bills that he's been tracking:

**House Bill 5607:** This bill is to eliminate the subminimum wage for persons with disabilities in CT. It was converted into establishing a Task Force to study at what the effect would be in eliminating the subminimum wage for persons with disabilities.

**Senate Bill 1472:** This bill is to develop strategic plan for optimal use of the DDS Regional centers. It has been converted to a Task Force to require the DDS to reopen applications for Medicaid-funded services as regional centers by January 2026.

**House Bill 6066:** A new committee was set up this year by agreement of the legislative leadership to look at the audit reports of the state auditors and to hold agencies accountable for what's in those reports. To explain the last audit report and how the department is going to move forward to resolve the issues that were brought up in that report.

**House Bill 7107:** This bill was converted to a Task Force. This is concerning a janitorial work program for persons with a disability. The Task Force is to study ways to expand governmental employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

**House Bill 7187:** This bill is about implementing recommendations of a report on employment assistance programs for individuals with disabilities. The recommendations of the group that looked at the bill are being adopted.

**House Bill 7108:** Human Services calls this the omnibus bill meaning that there's a whole lot of stuff thrown in there together that's not necessarily related to anything else, said Mr. Rothstein. One of

the things in there which is a little controversial is the continuation of looking at expanding DDS services to those individuals with higher level of need. The next phase of the study must be done before they can even consider whether they're going to expand the system or not, and that study will include looking at what the impacts of expanding the base of individuals that are eligible for DDS services. This study will analyze the impact on the existing people in the system and those that are waiting for DDS services now. In addition to the bill, there's a requirement that the department report on an annual basis the number of people with autism that are served by DDS. This will add more detail to what we now call the Census and provide an opportunity to figure out how many people could be in this pipeline that is part of the tsunami were tidal wave because 26.7%, according to the CDC, are individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities that require 24/7 care over a lifetime.

**House Bill 7108:** this is concerning autism and intellectual disability services and abuse and neglect investigations. To consider expanded eligibility criteria and require greater transparency regarding abuse and neglect cases.

Mr. Rothstein encouraged everyone to be involved. He reported that one group “Indivisible org” is coordinating a big protest, a big rally in Hartford on April 5<sup>th</sup> at the State Capital from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Shannon Klenk thanked Mr. Rothstein for the information he shared. That’s a lot of information, and Mr. Rothstein summarized it in a way that really helps her understand it. She appreciated Mr. Rothstein time, effort and reporting back to the committee. Annette Scully agreed and also thanked Mr. Rothstein for the shared information.

- **Open Forum for Public Participation**

Ms. Susan Prihar said that the meeting was comprehensive; other members of the RAC agreed. Ms. Silva encourage everyone to continue to provide any topics that they’ll like to hear more about for the agenda. Annette Scully asked Mr. Rothstein if there’s anybody that can give more information about the profound autism program and how to get more involved in it. Mr. Rothstein suggested a national website called Profound Autism Alliance ([profoundautism.org](http://profoundautism.org)).

- **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:14 pm.

The motion was made by Tamy Selinger and seconded by Shannon Klenk.  
The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Ether Diaz  
Executive Secretary