

DDS North Region
Regional Advisory Council

April 16, 2025

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

Members Present: Annette Scully, Donna Cohen, Rachel Keesler, Adrianna Ramirez, Rick Rothstein, Annette Scully, Tammy Selinger, and Stacie Silva, DDS North Regional Director (ex-Officio member).

Members Absent: Kathleen Hayes, Cindy Lichtsteiner, Kim Little, Chairperson, Ellyn Little, Mary Lou O'Connor, Susan Prihar, 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 5:03 p.m.

- Approval of Minutes – March 19, 2025

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

The motion was made by Tammy Selinger and seconded by Rick Rothstein.

The motion carried unanimously.

- Regional Director's Update – Stacie Silva

Regional Director, Stacie Silva thanked Ms. MaryPat 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 DDS and the individuals we serve.

Director, Stacie Silva, provided an update on the following key organizational matters, including the hiring freeze and potential strikes. Highlights included:

- **Hiring Freeze:** the hiring freeze is still in effect; there's no time frame on when it will end, however, DDS is prioritizing seasonal positions to open camps this summer. It is DDS priority to ensure that camp is available for their individuals this summer.
- **DDS RFP:** as previously mentioned at the last RAC meeting, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) granted DDS approval to seek proposals for ten (10) group homes; 3 group homes per region and 1 home that would be dedicated to medically fragile individuals who require tracheotomy care. The Request for Proposals was posted on April 7, 2025 and a conference for this project was held virtually on Monday, April 14, 2025. Mr. Richard Rothstein asked is there a particular target population; are those for age outs or for people that are just on the waiting list that live in the community now. Currently, those homes are for high level of need, age out individuals, said Director Silva.
- **Strikes:** Director Silva had no new updates regarding strikes; however, DDS continues to meet with providers to plan in case it has been decided that the strike will take place. Also, the Commissioner continues to meet weekly with the Governor's office.

- **DDS budget:** Director Silva reported that the Governor has his proposed version of the budget; DDS is now waiting for the legislative version and then the final budget. Ms. Silva reported that next week Ether Diaz will share with the group a link that helps to keep track of all the Senate and House bills. Mr. Rothstein asked if this is a general listing of all bills or is it related to DDS. Yes, said Ms. Silva, it lists the bills that the Committee are focused on. Ms. Donna Cohen expressed that in recent weeks she had a fairly good experience with GT Independence. She asked if the complaints have gone down. Director Silva responded that there's been a lot of work on triaging the communication process to address problems and making it more efficient. There's been improvement, but there is more work to be done. Ms. Donna Cohen stated that at some point there was a talk about having a representative dedicated to handle any questions or concerns regarding GTI. Is that off the table, she asked. That has not happened yet, said Director Silva, however, Joe Carvalho is assigned in the North Region as the go to when the tracking system isn't working efficiently.
- **Legislative Update**

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

House Bill-7108: Mr. Rothstein explained that he's working with the Selinger family and about 30 other people on this bill. This bill is an "omnibus bill" because it's not just on one topic, it's on issues concerning autism and intellectual disability services. The Human Services Committee had a lot of requests from different groups to bring things forward and they've been very cooperative with "our group to get the topics in that we were interested in", said Mr. Rothstein. The first issue that is in the bill is from years ago and that was continuing to explore changing the eligibility for services from an IQ model to some other functioning function kind of model. The purpose of that would be to open DDS waiver type services to individuals who have IQ's higher than 69, but are functionally not able to function independently. Mr. Rothstein explained that he did testify in support of that provision two years ago with a number of cautions; first, being staffing and second being money and both of those issues continue to be a problem for the population. The bill is also to require greater transparency regarding abuse, neglect and death investigations. This Bill has passed out of the Human Services Committee unanimously and on Tuesday, April 15th, Lt. Governor Bysiewicz hosted a press conference to celebrate profound Autism Day, which was proclaimed by Governor Lamont about a month ago.

House Bill 7103: this bill relates to the Katie Becket Medicaid waiver that allows the assets and income of the parents to be excluded in making a determination of eligibility. This covers the costs that the primary insurance does not cover. One of the two changes in the bill, one is that eligibility will be now 18 years old from 22. The Department of Social Services was able to clarify for the committee that once they're 18, they're able to qualify on their own for Medicaid and therefore the services that Katie Beckett would provide through Medicaid can now be accessed directly for those 18 years and above. The other change is the establishment of a portal so that families can see where they are on the waiting list. Unlike the DDS waiting list, the Katie Beckett waiting list is chronological, so if you're number one in the list then the next opening goes to you.

House Bill 7107: this bill is to expand governmental employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

House Bill 7109: this is a bill that will increase the rates for applied Behavioral Analysis Services (ABA) providers through Medicaid; this bill has been approved and is moving to the Committee now.

Senate Bill 807: This bill is to change the asset and income limits for Husky C beneficiaries.

Senate Bill 1472: this bill is concerning a task force to develop a strategic plan for optical use of the DDS regional centers.

Senate Bill 1476: this bill deals with the expansion of the ABLE Act; to be eligible to open an ABLE account the person must have a significant disability with an onset before the age 26. This bill is to expand the requirement to age 46 as of January 1, 2026.

Mr. Rothstein also reported that the Appropriations Committee ordinarily finalizes their version of the budget legislative budget by April 25th and the following events are coming up:

April 23rd: the Council on Development Services is having its annual legislative breakfast and awards day at 8:30 am. Also, the Council of DDS is going to honor about six members of the Council that have retired in the last year, including Mr. Rothstein.

April 28th : Autism Awareness Day at the Capitol; from 10am to 12pm there will be speakers including a speaker to talk about profound autism. In the North lobby from 12:00 pm-2:30pm there will be tables set up with exhibits and various providers of services.

May 20th: The Alliance is having its annual day of support for the nonprofit sector. The Alliance represents about 300 nonprofits not entirely within DDS but throughout the state, and their events have been very widely attended and been very successful in the past.

May 23rd : This day is by statute going to be IDD day in Connecticut, and that was another thing that was in the legislation two years ago. Director Silva reported that DDS is also planning an event at Camp Harkness on Memorial Day weekend, Friday, May 23rd.

- **Open Forum for Public Participation**

Rachel Keesler reported that the Connecticut Family Service Network is having the 2025 One Voice Conference on Thursday, April 24th in North Haven at the Clarion Inn from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. This event is for parents and caregivers of loved ones with special needs to meet and network with other parents; professionals and self-advocates are also invited to this event. There will be a keynote speaker as well as two breakout sessions. Those sessions are going to be one about compassion, fatigue and the other session it's called "Care for the Caregiver". There will also be having a self-advocate panel. This event is going to be in English and in Spanish. Also, they are launching an empowering caregiver's workshop series. This workshop is starting on May 7th from 12:00 pm to 1:30 pm for seven consecutive weeks.

Ms. Ramirez reported that they were able to partner with Northwest Early Childhood Center in Manchester, CT to run a play group during the winter month.

Rick Rothstein asked Chairperson and Director Silva for the chance to have the RAC meeting in person. Ms. Silva responded that she'll send a poll out to everyone to respond to see what is best for their schedules.

- Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:50 pm.

The motion was made by Shannon Klenk and seconded by Tammy Selinger.

The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Ether Diaz
Executive Secretary