



Claudio Gualtieri
Chair

PCA Workforce Council Meeting April 23, 2024

Council Members in Attendance: Claudio Gualtieri (Chair), Office of Policy and Management (OPM); Kathy Flaherty, CT Legal Rights Project (CLRP); William Halsey, Department of Social Services (DSS); Eileen Healy, Independence Northwest; Denise Paladino, Department of Developmental Services (DDS); Adam Prizio, Office of the Health Care Advocate (OHA); Fran Sinish, Parent; and Lucas Sundwall, Consumer Employer

Others in Attendance: Nicholas Jerard, DDS; Melissa Morton, OPM and Elyse Pearson, OPM

Call to order by Chair Mr. Gualtieri at 9:32 AM

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Gualtieri welcomed members and shared that Ms. Palladino will be transitioning from her role on the council. Mr. Gualtieri expressed gratitude for Ms. Palladino's incredible work, commitment, and contribution to contract negotiations, which have provided new benefits to Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) and strengthened the program for consumer-employers. Ms. Palladino's efforts have also assisted in the transition to the new fiscal intermediary (FI) GT Independence (GTI).

Ms. Palladino thanked the Council and expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to learn and remain an advocate for consumer supports and services. She also introduced the DDS Commissioner's new appointment: Mr. Nicholas (Nick) Jerard, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at DDS, who will step into the role as of May 1st.

Mr. Jerard appreciated Ms. Palladino's efforts and participation on this committee and looks forward to working with everyone. Mr. Jerard provided background on his work over the ten years he has been with DDS. Mr. Jerard has experience working as the Medicaid Operations Director at DDS before becoming CFO and is looking forward to applying his skills and working with the council.

Mr. Gualtieri then introduced Elyse Pearson staff from OPM. Elyse Pearson described her experience working with adults with Intellectual Disabilities/Development Disabilities (ID/DD) for ten years with Allied Rehabilitation Centers and three years with DDS.

Each member had the opportunity to introduce themselves to the group's new members.



2. Membership Update

Mr. Gualtieri expressed excitement to the group about a new member, Michelle Johnson, a Consumer-Employer; however, Michelle could not join today. Michelle has done work on the CT Council on Developmental Disabilities. Michelle's onboarding to the Council was completed using the orientation materials developed by the New Member Orientation Subcommittee.

Mr. Gualtieri shared that Peg Shugrue-Szymanski has resigned but has provided a nominee, another parent of a consumer. Elyse Pearson provided an update on meeting with the nominee, sharing that she seems like a viable candidate embedded in her and the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) communities. Confirmation of her commitment to the Council is still pending.

3. Training Fund Update

Mr. Halsey, Co-Chair of the Training Fund Committee, shared that there is a fully operational contract and DSS is working collaboratively with TUF on setting the courses eligible for tuition reimbursement.

Mr. Halsey identified that operational efficiency has set the groundwork for approving a substantial number of courses, making this year's focus and process run smoothly. Mr. Halsey shared that there are times when clarification on the course description is needed as it is often difficult to figure out by course name. Very few courses did not receive approval. The ones that did not get approved were a result of not aligning with the core competencies of the work of a PCA as defined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The union has not pushed back on denied courses. Mr. Halsey expressed that these courses provide value to the employees and that roughly \$35,000 is ready for tuition reimbursement. Some employees are obtaining certifications as Certified Nurses Assistants (CNAs), working towards nursing degrees and other medical degrees.

Melissa Morton asked who would pay the tuition reimbursement to the employees. Mr. Halsey shared that TUF would pay for it as they have the funds.

Mr. Gualtieri shared his appreciation for the workforce's ability to embark on educational opportunities to enhance the overall quality of the workforce. Mr. Gualtieri then presented the question if the new FI would provide the opportunity for credentials, whether it be a certification, training, or other coursework, would be able to be identified on the GT Independence registry. Mr. Halsey shared that they are currently

negotiating this with GT Independence and feel we could incorporate credentials as well as a person's multilingualism on the registry. Melissa noted that the union also asked GT Independence if this was possible, and Holly from GT Independence confirmed this can be done.

4. Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) Implementation Update

Mr. Gualtieri informed the Council that the CBA was approved on March 14, 2024, as a three-year successor agreement. Mr. Gualtieri continued that the legislature took up the companion resolutions, one in the Senate and one in the House, to ratify the agreement. Both in the Senate and House, there was a substantial majority in favor, which demonstrated the efforts and work of everyone in the rebalancing process and the importance of this program offering the least restrictive, most appropriate setting for consumers, and the ability to self-direct services.

Mr. Gualtieri directed the conversation to Mr. Halsey, as CMS approval is the next step of the approved CBA. Mr. Halsey shared that the Paid Time Off (PTO) modification and accrual, wages, and longevity will require CMS approval. DSS is asking CMS if there is a need to amend any waiver specifically regarding the respite, Independent Living Skills Trainer (ILSTs), and companions for their wages. The response is pending and needed in written form for confirmation. Community First Choice (CFC) is a State Plan Amendment, and DSS is confident the hourly rate for wages will be acceptable.

Mr. Halsey expressed the need to consult with the Department of Labor (DOL) regarding rate methodology and other aspects of the 24-hour per diem staff. A contact at DOL is established, and DSS will work on scheduling this meeting for further conversation.

Further discussion ensued regarding clarification on waivers, tentative dates, the prospective function of waiver services compared to state plans, and the ability to retro pay.

5. FI Transition (GT Independence)

Mr. Gualtieri expressed significant appreciation to all for GT Independence's transition and ability to remain responsive to many of the presented calls and concerns.

Mr. Halsey shared that the vast majority of PCAs are getting paid. The majority of the feedback regarding the Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) payment system has been positive. With the majority of PCAs getting paid, we are now facing anomalies such as employers being over budget or overlapping shifts. DSS has the opportunity to focus on



these cohort issues and address them.

Ms. Palladino shared that the collaboration from the state agencies has been phenomenal and meaningful when addressing quality. DSS and DDS are using the same system for criminal background checks, which has been helpful. Examination of the DDS and CFC overlap is taking place. GT Independence would like all supports and services inputted into their app, allowing for a new perspective on tracking support and service utilization. Ms. Palladino shared that GT Independence has a “CT Pod,” which is their customer service and technical support. The CT Pod has assisted with getting consumer employers enrolled in the app. Ms. Palladino expressed optimism about the Pod providing quality measures missed with previous FIs due to their inexperience.

Wait times and call volumes were a concern for a small amount of time during the transition. However, GT Independence was able to address and make changes regarding this concern. Ms. Palladino expressed a continued effort to support people through the change and ensure that this continues to be a smooth process for both Consumer Employers and the PCAs.

Mr. Halsey shared that PTO is fully operational, and roughly 3,000 hours have been used since the first disbursement of payroll. Mr. Gualtieri congratulated the group on their efforts to ensure this was possible, as he shared the previous hardships faced with PTO. Melissa Morton and Mr. Halsey both expressed that GT Independence has been very collaborative with problem-solving, including the CEO, and they also take ownership of their errors and find solutions in a timely manner.

6. Other Business

No other business was raised.

7. Public Comment

There was no public attendance at this meeting.

8. Adjournment

The motion to adjourn the meeting was moved by Fran Sinish and seconded by Kathy Flaherty. The meeting adjourned at 10:18 AM.

Full meeting recording can be accessed here:

<https://youtu.be/ckFm-QDxp8>