



CONNECTICUT FAMILY SUPPORT COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2016

- Location:** Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
Hartford, Connecticut
- In attendance:** Sara Lourie, Linda Mizzi, Robin Wood, Lisa Sheppard
- On Phone:** April Dipollina, Isabelina Rodriguez
- Absent:** Annika Burney, Laurie Cantwell, Sylvia Gafford-Alexander, Ann Gionet, Mark Greenstein, Steven Hernandez, Allison Quirion, Jody Santoro, Renee Tooper, Mona Tremblay
- Call to Order:** 10:30 am by Lisa Sheppard, Co-Chair

The meeting was called to order at 10:30; prior to that time there was not a quorum.

Approval of March minutes – Robin Wood made a motion to accept the minutes as written. It was seconded by Linda Mizzi and approved by Council members present.

Old Business:

Legislative Breakfast/2020 Focus – the Family Support Council, in collaboration with the Developmental Disabilities Council hosted a legislative event on April 7 in the Legislative Office Building. It was successful and attended by several legislators/legislative aides and quite a few family members. It was not possible to get the 2016 Annual Report update printed in time, but copies were made by several state agencies and included in an information packet disseminated to all attendees; these were also left in mailboxes of all legislators who did not attend. The packet also included information on the 2020 Campaign. Thanks to all the Council members who worked so hard to pull this event together.

The printed copies of the Annual Report, which are now available, will also be given to legislators and the Governor. Council members can pick up their copies at the next meeting and state agency members can pick up an extra copy for their Commissioner/Director at that time.

New Business:

Follow-up on scheduling presentations/discussions – At the May meeting, there will be a presentation by the Governor’s Prevention Partnership and the All Abilities Alliance.

Budget – Given the current budget situation, state agency representatives in attendance were asked to provide an update. In general, privatization is a theme across the agencies as is the hiring freeze and distribution of work among existing staff. In addition there was discussion around the impact of the Federal Workforce Investment Act amendments specifically due to requirements that will not allow state funding to support programs through which sub-minimum wage is paid to workers. This has implications for DDS, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and SDE among others.

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is waiting for an approved budget and has not had any layoff announcement as of today; there are program closures in process including two of the DDS operated Regional Centers; the assumption is that there will be additional privatization of DDS operated group homes – something already in process over the past year.

The State Department of Education (SDE) has not had layoffs as of yet but has felt the impact of staffing vacancies due to retirements and transfers which cannot be filled (including the position that provided liaison to the parent community) and redistribution of work among other staff. There were concerns expressed around cuts to cities and towns because of specific reductions targeted towards special education.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has had layoffs primarily at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School which has a reduced census and is on a longer term trajectory towards closure. DCF is also seeing the results of the hiring freeze with positions that cannot be refilled; the exception is direct Social Work positions which are subject to consent decree caseload size requirements.

It has been public knowledge and in the news that there is a proposed plan to privatize the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA). OPA funding and requirements are a combination of both state and federal. A final plan may not be known until the legislative session concludes and even though there is a projection that this would be completed by December 1, it is too early to have definitive information about the process and the final plan.

As in previous discussions, concern was expressed around the impact on families who this Council represents. It was pointed out that there are not large numbers at the Capitol pushing these issues, particularly as compared to other constituency groups. It was suggested that there needs to be an emphasis on finding ways to support families to talk to their legislators and the Governor, tell their stories and advocate for children with disabilities in whatever way they are able.

Given the enormity of the fiscal crisis, there was also discussion about cost-shifting. This not only creates challenges across state agencies but also in the area of private health insurance. The Office of the HealthCare Advocate has been working with several state agencies in this area. They will be invited to a future meeting to discuss their work with commercial insurance carriers to assure policy holders are getting the most out of their coverage when they have a child with disabilities. The Council members present were interested in identifying ways to support families in these efforts. Lisa Sheppard will

contact the state's HealthCare Advocate to discuss this possibility - hopefully for the June meeting.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am

Minutes submitted by Sara Lourie, Secretary