



State of Connecticut Department of Developmental Services

DDS

Ned Lamont
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

Developmental Services Council January 18, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Location: Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams

In attendance: Adrienne Benjamin, Fredrick Lenz Jr., Richard Rothstein, Diana Mennone, Pamela DonAroma, Brian Dillon, Patti Silva, Christine Hainsworth-Straus, Lisa Weisinger-Roland, Kevin Zingler, Damion Williams, Michael Beloff

Absent: None

DDS Staff: Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner, Wesaneit Tsegai, Executive Secretary, Kevin Bronson, DDS Director of Communications, Legislation, and Regulations, Shannon Jacovino, DDS Ombudsperson

Introductions

Chairman Silva called the meeting to order at 5:10 PM and noted that the threshold for a quorum was met.

Opportunity for Public Participation

Chairwoman Silva next asked if there were any members of the public who were interested in addressing the Council under the "Public Participation" section of the agenda. Members of the public are allotted three minutes to do so.

Sharon Saavedra: shared started by thanking the Commissioner for his assistance in an issue she has been facing with the group home where her daughter lives. She also asked the Council what plans are being discussed to attract quality care workers and hold group home staff accountable when incidents occur. The Commissioner shared that group homes are visited by Case management, Quality Service Review (QSR) Staff, and by Licensers at different points in the year, with the frequency varying based on the level of concern. He went on to share that DDS has invested greatly into addressing the workforce crisis, such as creating a position within the agency specifically to address this. There will also be additional funding to providers in the future to help providers with rate adjustments. Councilmember Pan DonAroma shares her experience with Futures, stating that staff retention has been a great struggle. She stated that she believe career growth will likely be the key to staff retention, and is excited about the steps being taken by the agency. Councilmember Adrienne Benjamin shared her experience advocating for staff around increased pay, and for new certifications such as Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT) Certification Program. Councilmember Christine Hainsworth-Straus asked if there was some type of pool of substitute staff that could help assist with shortages, the Commissioner shared that there are temp staffing agencies that help but are not enough to address the current shortages. Councilmember Diana Mennone spoke in agreement of the Commissioner's statements, and Councilmember Rick Rothstein stressed the importance of having regular staff in the home to ensure order.

This concluded the public comment portion of the meeting.

Dialogue

Chairwoman Silva moved on to the introduction of new members Michael Beloff, and Lisa Weisinger-Roland.

Councilmember Michael Beloff shared his story as a parent, as an advocate for over 20 years, and as a financial advisor that helps families with special needs children plan for their future.

Councilmember Lisa Roland introduced herself and shared her experience both as a parent, and as a physician. She will serve as the Medical Liaison to the council.

Other council members and DDS staff then introduced themselves.

Chairwoman Silva next brought up the approval of past minutes.

- October: A note was made to correct the spelling of Councilmember Kelly Dorsey's name. The motion was made by councilmember Adrienne Benjamin and seconded by councilmember Rick Rothstein. The motion passed unanimously.
- November: A note was made to correct the spelling of Councilmember Diana Mennone's name. The motion was made by councilmember Rick Lenz and seconded by Adrienne Benjamin. The motion passed unanimously.
- December: The Chairwoman suggested that these minutes be tabled for the next meeting. The motion was made by Christine Hainsworth-Straus and seconded by Rick Rothstein. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairwoman Silva moved on to the Ombudsperson report next. DDS Ombudsperson Shannon Jacovino shared her report for the month of December. She made the follow remarks during her report:

- ❖ Councilmember Rick Lenz asked Ombudsperson Jacovino to address a bullet point #6 in her report, "Institutional Policies and Practices, and Home And Community Based Services (HCBS) Support Settings" From what she has observed, Jacovino feels that providers have instituted policies that are institutional in nature, at group homes, and often may unintentionally discourage visitation and family involvement and family advocacy. She also notes that this is likely related to the staffing crisis and the impact of the pandemic. She shares an example of a group home that was still requiring families to schedule visits and go through a screening prior to their visit. Jacovino was able to work with DDS and the provider to update the policy and encouraged members to inform her of similar issues in the future.
- ❖ Councilmember Rick Lenz also asked Ombudsperson Jacovino to address the lack of conflict, free case management and a lack of clarity around state agency roles and responsibilities for individuals who live in Intermediate Care Facility For Individuals With Intellectual Disabilities (ICF ID) group homes. She shared that ICF group homes individuals do not have DDS case managers and there are three state agencies involved. DDS licenses the homes, DSS licenses the providers, and DPH oversees the homes. Within this structure, providers are providing case management. In cases where there is an abuse and neglect investigation, families feel there is not a lot of clarity around which state agency should be addressing those issues. Jacovino encourages families to reach out to legislators to help address this.
- ❖ Councilmember Roland requested that Ombudsperson Jacovino talk about assistive technology evaluation, stating that there's a huge wait list for kids and it's very frustrating for those individuals in apartment living to ensure their success. Commissioner Scheff said he would address this in her report.
- ❖ This concluded the Ombudsperson Report

Chairwoman Silva next moved on to the Commissioner's Report. Commissioner Scheff started by informing the group that the Abuse and Neglect report was now ready to review. The following remarks were made during his report.

❖ Abuse And Neglect Report- Recommendations

- Communication
 - DDS will be using ARPA funds to get a Case Management-Care Management system that they believe will improve communication for all parties. This will be done on a modular rollout. He shared that Communications Director Kevin Bronson can share more details on communications improvements in a future meeting.
- “Adding a category”
 - Commissioner Scheff said this is not feasible now due to a limitation of DDS’ system and certain statutes in place around the, however they are exploring adding data to the provider profiles and to the management information report, which would address an additional recommendation that was made.

❖ Legislative Update

- HB 5001
 - Section 1- Proposal for Continued Education
 - DDS is to develop a proposal for a transitional life skills program that would help individuals develop and cement skills prior to living in less restrictive settings. Leadership in the South Region has been assigned to work on this, they have an internal workgroup that is nearly finished and will look for stakeholder input prior to presenting their plan with the legislature.
 - Section 4-Study For New Statutory Definitions For ID And Use Of IQ
 - DDS will work to OPM to procure a vendor that will help make recommendations by studying national trends.
 - Section 11- Human Services Career Pipeline
 - DDS will continue to work with OWS in addition to pursuing other ideas alone.
 - Review Bill of Rights- Stakeholder input has been gathered in a final report, which was submitted to the legislature.
 - Sections 20, 21, 23- Transportation
 - DDS staff have been attending DOT meetings to study non-medical transportation services.
 - Also working on hiring a Transportation Manager to oversee work at DDS, which would include an RFP for a non-medical transportation program. This program would be piloted in Northwest Connecticut.
- Paid Caregivers- Waiver Amendment Process
 - Proposed language was submitted, and a public hearing occurred last month, where it passed unanimously.



❖ Discussion

- Abuse and Neglect Subcommittee
 - Councilmember Adrienne Benjamin spoke on the history of the subcommittee and why it was formed, she also shared what the purpose of the family guide was.
 - Councilmember Rick Rothstein shared his thanks to all members of the subcommittee and the DDS Staff that helped create the Family Guide and encouraged new members to reach out with any further questions.
 - Councilmember Rothstein also shared that DDS now has a Children’s committee. Commissioner Scheff shared a brief history on Children Services division being dismantled within DDS, and how ongoing relationships with the other agencies focused on children. He also shared that while DDS is supporting far fewer children in comprehensive settings than previous years, they are supporting more children in

their homes and in their communities when primary insurance and state plan benefit cannot cover them.

- Legislative Update-
 - Councilmember Michael Beloff asked if there are any updates on potential rollouts of plans related to Section 60 and PCA programs. Commissioner Scheff explained how the approval process works and shared that at this time DDS is waiting on Center for Medicaid Medicare Services (CMS) to approve the plan. Councilmember Beloff suggested a guide be created for families to help them understand would qualify for these waivers.
 - Councilmember Beloff also asked if the change in language under Section 4 impact eligibility requirements for DDS. Commissioner Scheff shared that while this could greatly increase the number of waiver participants, the cost per person based on needs for services could potentially be much lower. However, currently it would be difficult to quantify before language has been enacted.
- Assistive Technology-
 - Councilmember Roland asked if there would be assistive technology evaluations, sharing that there is a huge wait list for kids and very frustrating for those individuals in apartment living to ensure their success. The Commissioner shared that he had only recently been made of the backlog, DDS has offered to train as many people as agencies would like to send through training to become evaluators in addition to training more of agency staff to become at assistive technology evaluators. He shared that this backlog is likely a bottleneck of assessments being completed and will share an update on what the wait looks like and when it will likely clear.
 - Councilmember Pam DonAroma asked what providers were handling the training for AT evaluations. Commissioner Scheff shared that an RFP went out, and Oak Hill, Star, and Midstate ARC have all been awarded based on region. Unless they request a specific organization, participants will be assigned based on region.
- ❖ The commissioner shared a final update to inform the council that Leslie Samos who was very ill last year is now in great health. This concluded the Commissioner's report.

Chairwoman Silva moved on the Transportation Subcommittee's report. Councilmember Christine Hainsworth-Straus shared that the latest meeting of the committee was canceled. She requested that the results of the Transportation Survey be shared with her when they become available so she has time to process them in preparation for the next subcommittee meeting.

Chairwoman next shared that Councilmember and former chairman Kevin Zingler had just joined the meeting and gave him the opportunity to introduce himself to the new members.

Chairwoman Silva moved on to the next item, which was the legislative breakfast. DDS Executive Secretary Wesaneit Tsegai shared that she spoke with the office of Representative Rojas, and asked for details regarding when the event was held in previous years. Councilmember Zingler shared some details and suggested that it would be a good idea to meet with himself and Kevin Bronson to go into further detail. Councilmember Zingler shared that he is still looking for nominations for awards from the council.

Chairwoman Silva next share with the council that there will be a guest presentation for the February meeting from Deputy Commissioner Velardo to discuss employment incentives. She then asked for any potential future topics. The following potential meeting topics were suggested:

- ❖ Children's Division Overview- Tammy Vanenga
- ❖ Workforce Updates- Mary Pat Decarlo
- ❖ Paid Caregiver Waiver Amendments- Krista Ostaszewski

This concluded the discussion items, Chairwoman Silva asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Councilmember Kevin Zingler and seconded by Councilmember Christine Hainsworth-Straus. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes Recorded by:

Wesaneit Tsegai

Executive Secretary

DDS Central Office