



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

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Governor

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Commissioner

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**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
February 24, 2022**

Good Morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to testify in support of [H.B. No. 5037](#) **AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.**

The mission of DDS is to partner with the individuals we support and their families, to support lifelong planning and to join with others to create and promote meaningful opportunities for individuals to fully participate as valued members of their communities. More than 17,000 individuals are currently eligible for funding and services from DDS and the department is committed to utilizing innovative ways to support as many individuals as possible within available funding.

To begin, I must acknowledge the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on DDS as an agency, but more importantly on our service delivery system, our staff and every individual and family we support. Over the course of two years, DDS leadership and staff refocused much of our work to the health and safety of the individuals we support in the midst of a public health emergency. The agency was required to make swift decisions and necessary shifts to prioritize the well-being of those we support, while attempting to mitigate the immediate effects of a pandemic on a health and human services agency.

This meant DDS and our partners were forced to quickly learn new ways of doing business, including how to adapt necessary supports and services to ensure they could continue. Some of these shifts have been challenging, particularly in delivering direct care to individuals. Others have been rewarding and will be an important part of how the agency operates moving forward, such as better integration of technology in both direct care and administrative operations.

However, by working collaboratively with the department's many stakeholders, DDS has accomplished great successes even in this time of unprecedented challenge. We continue to expand our continuum of services with a focus on community integration, while identifying and implementing efficiencies in the way the department operates. I would like to take this opportunity to thank individuals with intellectual disability, their families, advocates, private providers and DDS employees for engaging with the department and continuing to inform our priorities. Together, we work to make the system better for everyone with intellectual disability. Your advocacy, passion and dedication keep us all moving down a path toward improvement.

Fiscal Year 2022 Achievements

Before discussing the specifics of the Governor's proposed budget adjustments for FY 2023, I would like to highlight some of the important progress the department has made this year, with the support of the legislature, to keep the individuals we support healthy and safe throughout the pandemic while improving the quality of services that we offer.

A few quick highlights from the course of the pandemic:

- As a 24/7 sector, DDS never shut down.
- Early on, DDS did restrict congregate day program activity to smaller groups, but that has been reopened since mid-2020, as PPE and other safety measures became available. During this time, DDS expanded utilization of virtual supports to ensure individuals remained connected.
- DDS also closed respite centers and camps in 2020, but those have been largely reopened, as well, with reduced capacity.
- DDS did receive federal approval for flexibility in the use of certain DDS Medicaid Waiver funding, including expansion of services as well as delivering services virtually or in settings that are more conducive to individualized support, which is still being used intermittently for some individuals during COVID surges.
- DDS received federal approval and funding to support our qualified provider network, particularly during periods when COVID surged that affected attendance at day programs, which then affected what day program providers were able to bill, while also placing more responsibility on residential service providers to staff for hours they normally would not have staffed.
- DDS stood up a PPE distribution process in spring 2020, which continues today. Through this distribution process, DDS has supplied PPE to both public and private programs, including Direct Support Professionals and Employers of Record in our Self-Determination program. To date, we have distributed more than 2.7 million pieces of PPE, including more than 75,000 rapid test kits just in the last month.
- DDS has supported vaccination and booster efforts for individuals and staff in public and private programs, including implementation of the various mandates that apply in our settings.

To give you a more recent snapshot:

- The Omicron surge hit the DDS system hard but seemed to follow the trend of less severe disease and negative patient outcomes. Individuals supported through DDS also have a high rate of vaccination.
- Omicron taxed staff in the system with high absentee rates, but we have seen these rates drop back down over the last couple of weeks.
- DDS closed DDS-operated respite centers for the month of January but will reopen them in late February.
- Many providers needed to pull back on sending individuals to day programs during the Omicron surge due to illness and risk of exposure. DDS continues to offer provider stability payments to ensure that the system remains viable.

Beginning in September of 2021, I embarked on a "Seeds of Change" virtual tour to connect with individuals, families, staff and providers on the future of DDS. The presentations offered an opportunity for stakeholders to connect with me directly. Topics of discussion included: strain to the provider network workforce, ways to improve current services, enhancements to communication between DDS and families and an opportunity to begin mapping out the future for DDS. The feedback received in these meetings was used to help shape our latest five-year plan (2022-2027), submitted to the legislature on February 1, 2022. This plan outlines agency planning using the Charting the LifeCourse framework, which focuses on growth, progress and priorities. Focus areas for the plan include Daily Life & Employment, Community

Living, Healthy Living, Safety & Security, Social & Spirituality, and Advocacy & Engagement. The Department's plan looks to meaningfully improve the quality of life of individuals with intellectual disability and their families. We continue to face opportunities for change, which we intend to meet by relying on our departmental strengths, assets, and relationships. We look forward to partnering with all of our stakeholders in making progress toward these priorities in the years to come.

Items of Interest in Governor Lamont's FY 2023 Proposed Budget Adjustments

Governor Lamont's proposed FY 2023 budget adjustments allow DDS to think creatively about how we can offer individuals more appropriate residential services that focus on enhancing independence and helping individuals to live and thrive in their community.

It is important to note that the funding for the DDS Residential Services Program is located in the Department of Social Services' budget in the line item "Community Residential Services". The account was transferred to DSS in FY 2017 for the purpose of maximizing Medicaid reimbursement. DDS residential services are still contracted and operated under the purview of DDS. Therefore, items highlighted in this testimony also will include those represented in the DSS Community Residential Services account.

Provide Funding to Support the ARPA Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Reinvestment Plan

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) enables states to earn an extra 10% federal reimbursement on a range of Medicaid waiver and related services from April 1, 2021, through March 31, 2022. This extra federal reimbursement (over \$213 million for Connecticut DDS and DSS combined) must be reinvested in enhancing, expanding and strengthening qualifying services which support community-based long-term services and supports over the three-year period ending March 31, 2024. The new federal funding, once reinvested as the state share, will leverage approximately \$228 million in new federal reimbursement to match those expenditures, resulting in total expenditures of approximately \$461 million over the full three-year period.

The state received conditional approval of DDS's HCBS spending plan in early December. DDS, in collaboration with the Department of Social Services, the state's lead Medicaid agency, continues to actively work through implementation of plan details that focus on growing the HCBS workforce, expanding and integrating the use of assistive technology, enhancing self-direction to empower individuals with intellectual disability to determine their own future, transforming the DDS delivery system and strengthening the quality of services to ensure individuals are receiving the services they need and are provided the opportunity to live the life they choose. The DDS share of resources necessary to support the reinvestment plan is reflected in a technical adjustment of \$56.5 million in DDS budget accounts and \$52.6 million in the DSS Community Residential Services account.

Initiatives Funded from Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds

The pandemic has greatly impacted the agency's ability to deliver supports and services in the same manner they were provided in a pre-pandemic world. Many supports moved toward a virtual platform during the pandemic, in order to ensure health and safety. Now, it has become increasingly important for individuals supported through DDS to have a mechanism to begin reconnecting with others in a real way as the state emerges from the pandemic. To this end, Governor Lamont directs resources to the following initiatives in his proposed budget.

Improve Camps for Individuals with Developmental Disability The Governor's budget allocates \$5 million in FY 2023 for infrastructure improvements for public and privately-operated camps. This would improve

service delivery for individuals with ID during their annual camp experiences. DDS is not otherwise funded to support these capital improvements, so this funding is critical to maintaining ADA and other health and safety requirements. This experience is a critical piece of community engagement for the individuals who attend, as well as a period of planned respite for caregivers.

Enhance Community Engagement Opportunities The Governor’s budget allocates \$5 million in FY 2023 to provide additional opportunities for recreational community engagement and leisure activities that facilitate socialization and connection, as we come out of the pandemic. Individuals with I/DD were frequently subject to more restrictions on community engagement throughout the pandemic, due to a higher level of health risks or living in higher-risk residential settings that were subject to additional health and safety protocols. This was an area specifically identified by stakeholders as a priority for inclusion in the DDS Five Year Plan 2022-2027.

Implementation of Additional Benefit Enhancements

Within the Office of Policy and Management budget allocation, additional funding is proposed to support benefit enhancements for employees in DDS provider settings.

An additional \$15 million in the OPM private provider account will supplement the existing \$30 million pool to enhance health and retirement benefits for direct care workers employed by contracted providers delivering services for DDS.

The department would like to express our deepest thanks to all of the DDS partners including the legislature, for their ongoing commitment to individuals with intellectual disability. We look forward to continuing our work together and expanding our ability to provide high quality services that support individuals with intellectual disability in achieving their personal goals within their communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Governor Lamont’s recommended budget adjustments for FY 2023. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have at this time and I look forward to working with all of you throughout the legislative session.