



Disability Rights Connecticut

"Connecticut's protection and advocacy system"

846 Wethersfield Avenue
Hartford, CT 06114

Jordan Scheff, Commissioner

Department of Developmental Services

460 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, CT

January 11, 2022

Dear Commissioner Scheff,

Thank you for sharing the draft of the Department's Five Year Plan: 2022-2027. It reflects considerable understanding of the issues facing individuals with disabilities, their families and the providers who serve them. As someone who participated, I appreciate you conducted the Listening Tour and some of what you heard is incorporated in the Plan.

It is positive to read of the DDS efforts to enhance self-advocacy; focus on the development of least restrictive settings; use technology as appropriate to support independence and cost effectiveness; and to respect the rights of individuals with disabilities to be employed and earn a living wage. The DDS' efforts to enhance individualized planning processes should help to forward these goals. The Vision and belief statements of DDS are all positive and reflect contemporary thinking in our field.

However I think the Plan does not necessarily propose actions that will move Connecticut in a more transformational way. I will focus on three main concerns I have after reading the draft. First, the Plan speaks to the need for greater community integration and employment for adults with Intellectual Disabilities (ID). You note the NCI findings of a few years ago that indicated Connecticut continued to be first in employment. However, our employment supports are the reverse of other states in that we have far more individuals in Group Supported Employment (GSE) than in Individual Supported Employment (ISE). ISE is not growing at any significant rate. Connecticut has fortunately started Customized Employment which should help but this plan does not address how DDS will truly incentivize this service and use it to support more individualized and better paying work for those we serve. Positively, businesses are expected to pay individuals with disabilities what their typical peers are paid and never less than minimum wage. The Plan does not address how this will diminish the participation over time of individual in GSE work situations, and how the DDS will address this and increase individual job placements.

The structure of our DSOs has not changed over time to reflect the direction of the field to support community engagement opportunities for individuals who are not working or not working full time. Too many adults spend the vast portion of their days in settings with other individual with disabilities. DDS should be advancing best practice in the area of meaningful community engagement as an alternative to site based day programs. It might be valuable to research other states' accomplishments in this area. As

one example, Virginia has worked diligently over the past few years to make this more available to its constituents.

Secondly, the Plan advocates providing residential supports in the least restrictive setting while promoting the most effective approaches to service delivery. DDS also appropriately envisions the public sector developing supports that address service gaps and support those with high intensity needs. The continuation of Southbury Training School and the Regional Centers is counter to the Department's aspirational goals in this area. These institutions are not the least restrictive, or to use a more progressive term, the most integrated settings for individuals with ID. They have always been expensive settings in which to serve people. Now that the total number of residents is 447 in STS and three Regional Centers, it is even less defensible to keep them open. These settings take an unequal portion of the DDS' budget and maintaining them is even less understandable in light of the Waiting List of almost 700 individuals with an urgent need for residential support.

The Plan recognizes the significant concern providers, and families and individuals who self-direct have with staff retention. As a provider, I greatly appreciate the Legislature's support in this biennium to increase wages. However, even with this infusion of funding, and the promise of additional increases in FY23, providers struggle both to retain staff, but of equal or greater importance to recruit capable people to serve as direct support professionals. I believe we must work in partnership to address the current workforce crisis if the goals of the five year plan are to be realized and Connecticut is to improve the quality of life of our citizens with intellectual disabilities.

Sincerely,

Kathryn

Kathryn du Pree

Executive Director Benhaven LLC

Board President Disability Rights of Connecticut

