



State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services

DDS

Minutes of the January 28, 2021 Meeting

Location: Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams

In attendance: Pamela DonAroma; Karen Hlavac; Rick Rothstein, Secretary; Diana Mennone; Deborah Ullman; Kevin Zingler, Chair; Rick Lenz; Christine Hainsworth-Straus; Joseph Duffy; Adrienne Benjamin; Arlene Reith.

Absent: Lisa Weisinger-Roland

DDS Staff: Commissioner Jordan Scheff; and Krista Ostaszewski, Director of Legislation, Regulations, and Communications; Rod O'Connor, Regulations Analyst; Joe Carvalho, Executive Secretary

Introductions

Kevin Zingler, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1102 AM

Moment of Silence

Public Participation

Patti Silva says hello and is eagerly awaiting her reappointment to the Council, and thanks to the Council for their work.

Topics for discussion

• 2021 Legislative Priorities Discussion with House Majority Leader, Representative Jason Rojas & House Minority Leader, Representative Vincent Candelora

o Majority Leader Rojas opened by thanking the Council for their work. Spoke on the importance of promoting policies to support individuals in the community and to ensure that they have agency, autonomy, and can fully participate in the community.

o Minority Leader Candelora opened by mirroring Representative Rojas' statements. Thanked the Council for their advocacy. Acknowledged the need to find services that meet the needs of individuals where they are, they need to modernize reimbursement schedules and is happy to be a partner in this process.

o Kevin Zingler thanked both legislative leaders for their advocacy on behalf of the Council and acknowledged the work being done by so many partners throughout the state, including current DDS leadership.

o Karen Hlavac - where are we in terms of vaccinating individuals with I/DD? o Commissioner Scheff - larger institutional settings are included in 1A, but there has been some delay in getting vaccines to some regional settings. 1B is where congregate settings would be included (group homes, other community-based living arrangements, and so on). 1B grew to be 1.4 million CT residents, which needs 2.8 million doses. The doses coming in from the Feds come in at 45,000 dose increments. Much of this is reliant upon the success of 3rd party actors (like CVS, Walgreens). CT is in the top 5 states re: vaccinations, and the Commissioner stated CT will keep working to improve its distribution process.

o Kevin Zingler - raised last year's legislative agenda, and how this year's legislative package from DDS is largely similar. Spoke about the importance of legislation regarding the Abuse & Neglect Registry system here in Connecticut. o Krista SB 416 is the bill number that contains DDS legislative priorities for this session.

o Issues important to the council - 14 C waivers, implications of \$15 minimum wage for the provider community, o Joe Duffy - If 14C goes away, Joe hopes that it is replaced by providing some sort of income for those who may lose jobs as a result.

o Adrienne Benjamin - the Biden administration is fighting the subminimum wage, but some people would be adversely affected by eliminating the subminimum wage, especially those who can't gain competitive employment. Encourages people to see information from National Council on Severe Autism.

o Pam DonAroma - feels conflicted on this issue. It may limit some opportunities for some individuals, but understands it's hard.

o Christine Hainsworth-Strauss - I have a child in every category: full minimum wage and partial minimum wage. Can there be some sort of economic incentive created to help address this issue?

o Rep. Candelora - regarding the subminimum wage, it cuts both ways and is complex. How do you honor work in a manner that is manageable for the employer financially? Looks forward to continuing this conversation.

o Joe Duffy - USDOL, every time there has been a rise in the wage in CT, there has been an increment. The subminimum wage isn't static, it's fluid.

o Rep. Rojas - thank you for the opportunity to meet. I'm familiar with several members of the Council, and opportunities to discuss these issues act as a reminder of how important these issues are.

o Commissioner thanked both legislative leaders for joining us.

• **Review and Approval of the December 17th and November 18 Meeting Minutes** o December - Joe Duffy, Adriene, passed unanimously

o November - Adrienne Benjamin, Joe Duffy, passed unanimously

• Commissioner's Report o Have heard some apprehension among providers and staff regarding getting vaccinated, but after having spoken to the Commissioner of NY's DDS, the Commissioner. ▪ Christine Hainsworth-Strauss - are medical directors at DDS aware of the differences between vaccines?

▪ Commissioner - Dr. Valencia Bagby-Young is in constant contact regarding the vaccination process.

▪ Christine - are we capturing information regarding reactions to Vaccines? We're tracking lots of information, but unsure of this piece of data.

▪ Krista - from a statewide perspective, the state is trying to centralize communication regarding Vaccines and can try to learn of resources for families who wish to share their experiences.

▪ Karen Hlavac - thank you for giving the vaccine report to the legislators who were on call. They must understand what's being done regarding vaccines and this population. Is there a way to sign up for a public hearing?

▪ Krista - you must register in advance via Zoom. A link should be able to be found via the CGA's bulletin to sign up to testify in advance.

o Commissioner has seen upticks in congregate settings consistent with the rise in similar settings throughout the state. We remain vigilant. We're not seeing the same type of drop-off as the rest of the state but hope to see that trend downward soon. Vaccines will help. Working with the provider community to ensure as many eligible people are vaccinated ASAP. The Arc of CT has a powerful video regarding the importance of getting vaccinated. ▪ Pam DonAroma - mentioned a video from Tyler Perry that seems to be popular among people she knows and seems to calm some concerns.

▪ Kevin Zingler - there needs to be trust. We've found at MARC, that if there are people in the community that have personal connections to a larger audience, the audience is much more likely to heed the guidance from a trusted source.

▪ Pam DonAroma - providers have been working as a team to answer questions from Staff, and have been rolling out an aggressive campaign to provide accurate information to keep people safe.

o Commissioner - before COVID, there was an issue that garnered a lot of attention concerning racial disparities and the Department. A position has been posted at DDS to help evaluate and promote cultural competency, equity, and inclusion at DDS. ▪ Rick Lenz - any thoughts on the budgetary outlook this year? How does it affect DDS? • Commissioner - OPM approved a plan that could keep us fiscally whole to help providers continue services. If looking at the next biennium, we currently don't have the package in front of us. I suspect the types of things that will get hit are Public salaries, but I don't foresee major pain coming.

• Rick R. - did the agency have to submit some potential savings?

- Commissioner - the budget options are posted on the website and can be shared with the Council.
- Joe Duffy - have had conversations with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucuses regarding teaming up to advocate for folks with I/DD and to work together to calm the concerns of these historically marginalized communities.
- Christine Hainsworth-Strauss - what about the future of grants?
- Commissioner - hoping to make more grants available if money is available.

o Commissioner - wants to note the kind words of Kevin from earlier. It's been a challenge, but we have an incredible team. Thank you for the kind words, I will share these sentiments with the staff.

• **Virtual Legislative Breakfast**

o Kevin revisited the subject of a Legislative event hosted by the Council. It doesn't need to be a breakfast, but how do we engage with legislatures in a virtual format. Can a subcommittee be arranged? Maybe reaching out to providers to create a short video regarding the work being done across the state. o Karen moved to create this committee, Seconded Adrienne, passed unanimously to create a committee to draft ideas for a virtual legislative breakfast

o Committee volunteers- Deb, Kevin, Joe C., Pam, Diana.

• **Topics for Next Meeting**

o Karen - concerned about retirements in the state over the next few years.

o Commissioner - there will now be allowed staff overlap so that there can be opportunities to train new hires alongside the incumbent of a position.

o Adrienne - Autism Speaks, there are a lot of publications re ID and Autism together. a nurse of pediatrics found that 40% of folks with ID have autism. Why are there continual issues with providing services to more severe cases?

o Christine - have been told by her kids' employers that unless they get vaccinated, they can't return to work. There has been a degradation of skills and independence levels throughout the pandemic. Can there be resources for this? How is respite being handled for family burnout?

Motion to Adjourn - made by Joe Duffy and seconded by Pam, passed unanimously

Meeting adjourned at 12:42 pm.