



# State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services

# DDS

## **DRAFT Minutes of the February 17, 2022 Meeting**

**Location:** Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams

**In attendance:** Adrienne Benjamin, Christine Hainsworth-Straus, Deb Ullman, Diana Mennone, Karen Hlavac, Kevin Zingler, Rick Rothstein, Pam DonAroma, Patti Silva, Rick Lenz;

**Absent:** Arlene Reith; Joe Duffy; Lisa Weisinger-Roland

**DDS Staff:** Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner; Kevin Bronson, Director of Communications, Legislation & Regulations; Shannon Jacovino, DDS Ombudsperson; Joseph Carvalho, Executive Secretary

## **Introductions**

Kevin Zingler, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM

## **Moment of Silence for those affected by COVID-19**

## **Opportunity for Public Participation**

Donna Cohen, a parent of an individual, introduced herself and said she's excited to learn more about the council.

## **Topics for discussion:**

- Review and Approval of previous council meeting minutes – 5 Minutes
  - January 20, 2021, Meeting Minutes
  - Motion made by Karen Hlavac seconded by Rick Rothstein to approve minutes as amended.
  - Passed unanimously
- Ombudsperson Report
  - Rick Lenz – asked what the number next to the issue type denotes.
    - Shannon Jacovino – Last month the Council had asked Shannon to indicate the amount of times a particular issue had come up, and Shannon reflected this change in this month's report.
  - Patti Silva – maybe we create a note on the ombudsperson report to ensure readers can easily know what these numbers mean.
    - Shannon Jacovino – that is a great suggestion and I'll work to include that.
  - Patti Silva – the only other suggestion would be to add page numbers.
  - Rick Rothstein – suggestion what was it? (around 22:00)
    - Shannon Jacovino – that's a great suggestion. If anyone on the council has a family member needs help connecting to a provider, please let me know.
  - Karen Hlavac – I want to agree with the areas of concern the Ombudsperson listed in her report: the staffing crisis in both public and private, and Karen hopes the Commissioner can address this later in his report.
    - Shannon Jacovino – Thank you for raising that. Maybe we can discuss later how the Council would like to address and take action to highlight the issue.
  - Adrienne Benjamin – describes her positive experience with her own case manager but has heard from other parents and people that they have not had similar experiences. Not sure how widespread these experiences are, but we need to know how to improve outreach and follow-up done by case managers.
    - Shannon Jacovino – to date, I have only received one complaint regarding a case manager not getting back to a family or individual.
  - Patti Silva – I did catch one typo
    - Shannon Jacovino – I also saw that and will correct.

- Shannon Jacovino – my nomination hearing is next Thursday at 10:00 AM, and if the Council or members of the Council wish, she encourages supporting testimony.
- Commissioner’s Report – 30 Minutes
  - Commissioner noted a question that was put in the chat by a member of the public. The Commissioner noted that it is during public participation that members of the public may ask questions, but we will follow up with you after the meeting.
  - Commissioner noted that Kevin Bronson will join closer to 5 PM as he had another obligation.
  - Covid Update
    - DDS has maintained an Incident Command Structure, and throughout Omicron, we were meeting weekly. We have resumed a biweekly cadence as numbers are rapidly declining – for example, Public Division is currently Covid-free among individuals served by DDS.
    - Respite – we didn’t have adequate testing and other supplies, but respite centers will be reopening by the end of February.
  - Budget
    - My testimony will be submitted in writing, and Commissioners are encouraged to keep their verbal testimony brief.
    - The Governor’s budget is good for DDS. There were no cuts. There is a process of IT centralization that will be marked by shifting funds from DDS to another agency that will now house IT functions for the state.
    - You will see some ARPA and FMAP adjustments that are good for providers and individuals served.
  - Retirement Cliff
    - About 6 weeks away from April 1 which marks the beginning of many retirements from many areas of the department.
    - Because of the number of people retiring, where there is appointing authority, there will be both be appointments made but also a competitive application process, augmented by temporary worker retirees.
  - Provider Relief
    - We did issue some guidance regarding QSR and non-critical training extensions. We are working on med administration concerns while safeguarding the health of the individuals we serve.
    - AAID Investigation/Report
      - Our level of vacancies in CT of provider employees is below the national average. Beginning July 1, at \$17.25 is the highest starting wage for direct care staff in the country.
    - Trying to identify a role within DDS to work with providers to address workforce development concerns and to liaise with the Governor’s Workforce Council.
  - Case Managers
    - While we are facing some incoming retirements, we are working on refilling these positions as seamlessly as possible, and to bolster current case management by increasing the total number of case managers.
  - ID Partnership Grants
    - I did touch base with staff members on this and due to the many other priorities, we haven’t been able to provide a report. We are hoping to provide this as soon as possible at an upcoming DS Council Meeting.
  - Questions?
    - Rick Lenz – you said March 1, and April 1 as big dates in terms of pending retirements?
      - Commissioner – yes, these are common months for state employees to retire. March we will begin to see some retirements increase, but April marks a bigger increase of retirements.
    - Adrienne Benjamin – I have not read the Governor’s budget, but the Arc has asked the public to submit testimony to increase funding. Also, I saw that McDonalds employees are making \$18.00 an hour.
      - Commissioner – many recent infusions of funds have been specifically focused on wages in our service system. Anecdotally, I have seen gas station attendant jobs have been advertising for \$20 an hour, and even \$25 an hour. While it is challenging, it is not isolated to CT and we have been working to address these concerns as best we can, and we will continue to do so. Last June, there was a nearly 20% increase in wages in our system where other sister agencies only saw a 3% or 4% increase in wages.



- Lisa Weisinger-Roland
- All those in favor?
  - Passed Unanimously
- Adrienne Benjamin – are there ways to highlight the nursing crisis in this testimony?
  - Commissioner – there is a competition for resources and labor between DDS and its sister agencies. We are working to align these efforts to attract workers, including nurses, into human service agencies.
- Kevin Bronson – announced that on 10AM on February 24<sup>th</sup> will be the DDS Budget Presentation and beginning at 2PM will be the Public Hearing for DDS’ Budget.
  - Kevin Zingler - is there consensus that, if needed, the Council can hold a special meeting of the council to accommodate the legislators’ schedule.
- Topics for Future Council Meetings – 5 Minutes
  - Katie Rock-Burns to discuss ID Partnership
  - Cheryl Ellis to introduce her work as DEI Director

Adjournment

- Karen Hlavac made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Patti Silva Meeting adjourned at 5:59 PM.

**Next Meeting March 17<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 PM via Teams.**