



# State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services

# DDS

## **DRAFT Minutes of the March 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; Arlene Reith; Joe Duffy; Lisa Weisinger-Roland

**Absent:**

**DDS Staff:** Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner; Peter Mason, Deputy Commissioner; Kevin Bronson, Director of Communications, Legislation, & Regulation; Cheryl Ellis, Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Joseph Carvalho, Executive Secretary

## **Introductions**

Kevin Zingler, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM

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

Kevin Zingler, Chair, took a point of personal privilege to welcome and thank Deputy Commissioner Peter Mason who is set to retire from his state service on April 1, 2022.

Deputy Commissioner Mason thanked the Council for their kind words and thanked them for all they do advocating on behalf of individuals and families across the state.

## **Opportunity for Public Participation**

Donna Cohen, mom of a 20-year-old person with Autism and ID, asked why there isn't an online form for a process re: self-direction.

Commissioner Scheff – there are some modernization efforts underway, but we will work to get you in touch with a staff person who can help.

## **Topics for discussion:**

- **Review and Approval of previous council meeting minutes – 5 Minutes**
  - February 17, 2022
  - Motion made by Karen Hlavac seconded by Rick Lenz to approve minutes as amended.
  - Passed unanimously
- **Introduction of Cheryl Ellis, Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion**
  - Commissioner Scheff introduced Dr. Cheryl Ellis as DDS' new Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion.
  - Cheryl Ellis provided her pronouns like she/her/hers and highlighted her work with young people, and pregnant persons, among other settings and how she wants to use these experiences to inform her work at DDS. Cheryl outlined recent efforts at DDS including a monthly newsletter, developing a strategic plan, and working with Self-Advocate Coordinators to ensure their voices are represented in the monthly newsletter, as well as trying to show support for the conflict in Ukraine.
  - Patti Silva – is this something that can be distributed to families via Case Managers?
    - Cheryl Ellis – that is a direction that's been discussed, and that we intend to pursue.

- Commissioner Scheff – we will work with Kevin Bronson as well to ensure that messages like these are distributed in a coordinated way, and to ensure interested parties receive updates that are important to them.
  - Rick Lenz – Will your strategic plan become available to the Council at some point?
    - Cheryl Ellis – it’s our desire to share information in a way that’s consistent with our communications strategy and we’ll be sure to provide updates as time goes on.
  - Adrienne Benjamin – is this a physical newsletter, or is this shared online?
    - Cheryl Ellis – currently, it’s in a digital format
    - Adrienne Benjamin – I think it’s important to bridge technological barriers by mailing physical copies of the newsletter to interested parties, and to ensure that they are bilingual.
  - Karen Hlavac – perhaps post cards of upcoming events and services might be helpful because it is less costly than
  - Christine Hainsworth-Strauss – I would encourage that communication to be sent directly to families to ensure timely notice of various opportunities.
    - Kevin Bronson – we are trying to focus on streamlining communications and to avoid multiple handoffs of news and important updates before reaching families.
- Ombudsperson Report
  - The Ombudsperson had a conflict and is unable to attend due to a RAC meeting, and regrettably was unable to produce
  - Motion by Rick Lenz to table this agenda item until next month’s meeting
    - Passed unanimously.
- Commissioner’s Report – 30 Minutes
  - Noted that April 1 begins the anticipated increase of retirements in DDS and across the state of Connecticut.
  - Deputy Commissioner Mason will be retiring on 4/1, and Elisa Velardo will be partnering with Commissioner Scheff as the new Deputy Commissioner beginning 4/1.
  - Stacie Silva-Gordon will be stepping up from her role as Private ARD to become the new North Regional Director.
  - Valencia Bagby-Young, Director of Health and Clinical Services, is anticipated to retire on 4/1
  - Thomas Dailey and Greg McMahon, both from the South Region, will be retiring on 4/1
  - There are a host of other anticipated retirees, but as daunting as that sounds, we have a remarkable team and will work to get through this period of transition.
  - Commissioner paused for questions.
    - Rick Lenz – are there a lot of Case Managers retiring?
      - Commissioner – not that I expect, I believe it is higher level than CM’s but we will check and get back to the Council.
    - Karen Hlavac – when do you anticipate refilling these vacancies?
      - Commissioner – many of these positions will be temporarily maintained by Temporary Worker Retirees, but those are limited to 120 days of employment in this manner. We have been working to ensure this happens as quickly as possible.
    - Rick Rothstein – Greg McMahon who is that?
      - Commissioner – he is the IFS ARD in the South Region and has a lot of experience in many areas of the DDS service delivery system.
    - Rick Rothstein – this is not directly related to DDS, but do you expect there to be other changes related to OPM’s leadership?
      - Commissioner – I don’t suspect any other changes; Secretary Beckham is well suited to carry on this work.
  - Commissioner – provided update re: DDS’ HCBS ARPA Spending Plan
    - It’s a 460 million infusion over several years to help fund programs, enhancements, and initiatives aimed to:
      - Enhance HCBS workforce
      - Expand integration and use of assistive technology
      - Enhance self-direction
      - Enhance and Expand HCBS delivery transformation
      - Enhance provider infrastructure

- Strengthen Quality
    - Among other important areas of our service delivery system
  - Commissioner paused for questions
    - Adriene Benjamin - What's the process of Case Managers trying to find less restrictive settings for individuals who want them?
      - Commissioner – we have seen individuals move from group homes to CCH's, and other signs of progress, but not at the scale we would like to see. Progress has been made, and we continue to add options
    - Adrienne Benjamin – parents who have gone through the LON process should be included as folks examine the LON tool.
      - Commissioner – this examination of the LON is a statistical evaluation of the tool, but I will relay this interest to the team involved with this.
    - Christine Hainsworth-Strauss – is this going to be posted somewhere?
      - I believe it is available publicly, but we will work to share this in some way with the Council.
  - Kevin Zingler thanked the Commissioner for his report and the work his team has done on all that was described.
- SEBAC update
  - Commissioner – Looking at various adjustments to recognize the important work done by frontline workers and others. The thirty or so bargaining units within SEBAC, as well as the legislature, need to approve the agreement before it goes into effect, but there has been much good work done to get it to this point.
- Journal published by NASDDDS
  - Commissioner – a workforce analysis regarding FY 2020 or 2021. CT ranks highly, if not the top, in terms of pay to staff and at the time of the report, the vacancy rate was better than average.
  - Kevin Zingler – I encourage the council to continue to review the study, and to send questions to Joe for DDS' review and response.
- Topics for Future Council Meetings – 5 Minutes
  - Dianna Mennone – is there any update re: appropriations committee and how are the work sessions going? How do you feel things are going?
    - Commissioner Scheff – we are working with the legislature to address differences that exist and to ensure agency priorities are met.
  - Adrienne Benjamin - Investigation Process in a group home is not good, nor transparent. I hope the Council can discuss this.
    - Kevin Zingler – I will discuss with the Commissioner on how to discuss this at an upcoming meeting.

## Adjournment

- Patti Silva made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Rick Lenz Meeting adjourned at 5:52 PM.

**Next Meeting April 21st at 4:30 PM via Teams.**