



State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services

DDS

DRAFT Minutes of the January 20, 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

None.

Topics for discussion:

- Review and Approval of previous council meeting minutes – 5 Minutes
 - December 16, 2021, Meeting Minutes
 - Motion made by Deb Ullman seconded by Adrienne Benjamin to approve minutes as amended.
 - Passed unanimously
- Ombudsman Report
 - Shannon Jacovino introduced herself and reviewed two matters included in January's report with which she is assisting and indicated that she had made a report to AID as a mandated reporter.
 - Shannon indicated that with every single case where Shannon has pursued resolution, DDS has responded openly and with a sincere desire to help.
 - Shannon noted she has concerns regarding the ongoing staffing crisis
 - Kevin Zingler opened the floor for questions for Shannon
 - Rick Lenz – have people been responsive to your inquiries?
 - Shannon – yes, everyone has been responsive.
 - Adrienne Benjamin – noted how the previous ombudsperson would detail the number of calls from different types of individuals (staff, case managers, individuals served, etc.)
 - Shannon – not the first time this has been requested, and I will include this in future reports
 - Kevin Zingler thanked Shannon for her report and introduced Commissioner Scheff.
- Commissioner's Report – 30 Minutes
 - As we begin to come out the other side of the omicron surge, DDS underwent covid-related absences in the Public Division that reached nearly 25%. That said, individuals served made it through largely without any adverse. Hoping to reopen respite in February. There will be test kits available to individuals being readmitted into these settings. Absenteeism in public division today was only 12% which is an improvement from even just the week before. The Commissioner opened it up for questions.
 - Adrienne – what is the quarantine period being used by CT currently?
 - Commissioner – Kevin Bronson will send formal guidance to Council members.

- DDS just completed two public hearings regarding the DDS 5 Year Plan 2022-2027. The team is currently reviewing and organizing the feedback provided in written form, as well as posting the hearings online soon.
 - Rick Lenz – did you find the Council’s testimony helpful?
 - Commissioner – yes. What’s different now with strategic plans than when I started? Planning for a 5-year window of time has become harder as more and more happen within these 5-year timeframes.
- Workforce – the dept. has been trying to help providers stabilize wages, develop recruitment strategies, and have not been able to stem the tide. Part of the problem is that we are competing with providers and other state agencies to hire a workforce that is a challenge to reach. Trying to balance training requirements against staffing needs is challenging. We are evaluating these factors, and trying our best to work collegially with private providers, but the notion of extending re-training on abuse and neglect is not a place we want to go to, but we are working with everyone as best we can to keep operations running and running safely.
 - Rick Lenz – as far as recruitment, I saw Sen. Osten is proposing a 4-5% increase in wages over the next few years. Would that be helpful?
 - Commissioner – it would be particularly helpful for private providers. I don’t think it’s strictly about wages. I don’t know if \$20 an hour will solve this problem. There is an increased desire to work remotely, but you can’t provide direct support remotely.
 - Karen Hlavac – has there been consideration of consolidating settings?
 - Commissioner – two part answer:
 - Public – as you’re aware, we have consolidated and rearranged things on an ongoing basis within the Public Division and STS. Consolidating locations is often the opposite of person-centeredness.
 - Private – we currently have a moratorium for the Regions to create CLAs without Central Office approval. Continuing to develop new CRSs or CLAs while we have vacancies, disservices the existing provider infrastructure.
 - providers have different levels of interest in conversations regarding service stabilization. Some providers simply don’t have the bandwidth to participate in some conversations.
 - Karen Hlavac – getting a lot of feedback from the community regarding difficulty with communication with Case Managers, particularly when it comes to communicating via MailGate.
 - Commissioner – I will discuss and look into this concern with the Director of Case Management. Made a note that we need to be vigilant to meet people where they are and the need to understand differing levels of technological literacy.
 - Patti Silva – reiterated the importance of this issue
- ARPA – the money has not been encumbered yet. There are some requirements on our part including periods of comment, a legislative hearing process, and a 90 day approval process for the Feds. There are a number of ways DDS would like to spend the funds in ways that address and alleviate many of the concerns we discussed tonight.
- Dr. Cheryl Ellis has joined the DDS leadership team as DDS’ new Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. After a long process of many. She will be splitting her time 50/50 between department and staff DEI concerns. Dr. Ellis is also being looped into national conversations facilitated by NASDDDS. DDS is thrilled to have Dr. Ellis bring her knowledge, experience, and expertise to the Department.
 - Christine Hainsworth-Straus – can you tell us more about the MailGate system?
 - Commissioner – it is an algorithm, that sometimes seems random in its process of determining what is sensitive information. Some staff have the ability to send emails that bypass this system, but they need to clean any email before doing so and that is not a feature that can be shared system-wide due to privacy.
 - Rick Lenz – asked about the ID Partnership
 - Commissioner – discussed with the team and we will aim to report out at the next meeting.
 - Kevin Zingler – thanked the Commissioner and the Department for their work distributing test kits
 - Commissioner – it’s a great team doing great work trying to get these kits out as expeditiously and as orderly as we can.
- Legislative Breakfast – 15 Minutes

- Kevin Zingler – Kevin Bronson, do we have an update regarding when/how it might be most optimal to host this event?
 - Kevin Bronson – a determination has yet to be made, but I suspect it will be a hybrid session. Not sure if a hybrid breakfast would be possible or practical. I have looked at dates and suggests the Council looks at the middle of March due to the legislative calendar.
 - Kevin Zingler – we should explore getting onto an official calendar to reserve the space, whether on a calendar or an actual physical space. We do want to pursue this as a Council, and the next step is to find out what the reservation process, and/or the process to get onto the legislative calendar is.
- Christine Hainsworth-Straus – what is the IDD Caucus doing?
- Kevin Zingler – we can take the next month to identify a process to get onto the legislative calendar and to set a date.
- Rick Rothstein – the legislature gavels in during February, so if we can determine how to sign up and reserve a time/space for this event by the next meeting, that would be great.
- Legislative Session – 15 Minutes
 - Kevin Zingler – the Governor is set to release a budget in the coming weeks, and wanted to know if DDS was ready to discuss some of their priorities ahead of the legislative session?
 - Kevin Bronson – last year, DDS passed an agency bill after several years of attempts. I will check with my team, but this year’s legislative plans are largely technical – for example, changing the definition of a membership requirement for one member of the DS Council. DDS is planning to provide a weekly legislative update to DDS stakeholders.
 - Kevin Zingler – I remember receiving Rod O’Connor’s legislative updates and always found them helpful, especially for families and providers to know when public hearings are being held, etc... Any other thoughts on legislative session?
 - Kevin Bronson – I want to add a thank you for your continued patience as we make improvements to our website, and work on other improvements to how we engage providers, families and the public at large.
- Topics for Future Council Meetings – 5 Minutes
 - Kevin Zingler – aside from having Katie Rock-Burns or Amber Burke to join us to discuss ID Partnership grants, does the council have any other suggestions?
 - Patti Silva – perhaps we can have Dr. Cheryl Ellis attend an upcoming meeting to discuss her work?
 - Joe Carvalho to follow up.
 - Christine Hainsworth-Straus – have the public hearing videos been posted to the website yet?
 - Kevin Bronson – we will be posting the videos tomorrow.
 - Patti Silva – was there a concern with the Council’s testimony regarding the 5 Year Plan?
 - Kevin Zingler – a member had asked that their name be redacted from the testimony due to privacy concerns and the concern has been addressed.
 - Kevin Zingler – wanted to thank Rick Rothstein and Karen Hlavac for putting together the initial draft of the Council’s testimony, and the entire Council for their input on the testimony for DDS 5 Year Plan.

Adjournment

- Rick Lenz made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Patti Silva Meeting adjourned at 5:53 PM.

Next Meeting February 17th at 4:30 PM via Teams.