



Ned Lamont
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

South Region



Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

Cres A. Secchiaroli
South Region Director

**South Region Regional Advisory Council (RAC)
Meeting Minutes
Recorded on 1/18/23**

Attendees: Cres Secchiaroli, Regional Director; Noreen Hills, Administrative Assistant; Gunnar Abrahamsson, Executive Secretary; Carol Cooney, Haley Parent, Nancy Kalal, Diane Martin, Kate Haaland, Lynn Arezzini, Dawn DeMatteo

Guests attending: Heidi Earle

Discussion: The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:10PM. Regional Director (RD) Cres Secchiaroli asked for the council to make introductions as there are some new members who have recently joined. Executive Secretary Gunnar Abrahamsson asked if there were any citizen comments; there were none and that portion of the agenda concluded with no updates or commentary.

RD Secchiaroli began the Regional Director Updates portion of the agenda by discussing a recent change in secretarial staff at the South Region. RD Secchiaroli explained that this will be Gunnar Abrahamsson's last Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meeting in the South Region (SR). Mr. Abrahamsson has been called up to Central Office to serve as Commissioner Jordan A. Scheff's Executive Secretary. RD Secchiaroli explained that Noreen Hills, who was in attendance, would be taking over as the Executive Secretary in the South Region.

RD Secchiaroli moved into some of the funding initiatives being undertaken by the agency. The department has started and implemented three funding initiatives to help with the Residential Needs Waitlist. The first initiative is looking at individuals on the waitlist who have caregivers who are above a certain age, initially this age was 73. A number of individuals who met these criteria were identified; the department began supplying funding to address the needs that originally placed them on the waitlist. Since the initial rollout, the threshold age for the caregiver has been lowered to 70. This initiative began in November.

The second initiative the department is looking at is targeted at individuals living at home who receive some supports but has asked for additional supports from the department while staying in a family home. This was considered the "under served list". These individuals have been identified statewide, the department has contacted them and notified them that the department now has the additional funding that it was previously unable to provide. Funding for these individuals has been allocated.

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The third initiative that the department is working on was initially looked at decades ago under the Enhanced Family Supports (EFS) title, due to inflation the department decided to allocate on average \$10,000 for approximately 33 individuals per region who met certain criteria (living at home, wanting a small amount of funds to afford certain services within the waiver etc). This was just initiated in December of 2022. In the South Region 25 of the 33 individuals and families have been started on the enhanced funding initiative.

The department recently appointed three new Regional Directors to each of the three Regions (North, West, and South), these initiatives were devised by the new RD Leadership in an effort to diversely distribute and allocate funds to a wide variety of individuals throughout the department.

RD Secchiaroli asked if there were any questions, Diane Martin indicated she had one.

Diane Martin asked RD Secchiaroli what the waitlist looks like currently; and what was the total number of individuals that were assisted through the rollout of these new initiatives?

RD Secchiaroli explained that he will follow up with the number of individuals currently still on the waitlist, he does not currently have that information available. As of 1/18/23 the South Region has identified 43 individuals that were on the Elderly Caregiver Initiative. For the EFS initiative there were around 100 individuals who were identified statewide, approximately 33 per region. The department has identified 37 individuals on the underserved list, of the 37, 27 have already been placed with services and supports, there are approximately 9 individuals remaining on that list. RD Secchiaroli expressed his admiration to the case management teams who have done an excellent job in making this happen.

RD Secchiaroli next moved into providing recaps on the recent Stakeholder Forums recently held by Commissioner Scheff. RD Secchiaroli asked the RAC if they had any feedback to give.

Lynn Arezzini expressed her appreciation for the forums being held.

Carol Cooney was very impressed with the forums.

Carol Cooney began discussion surrounding receiving technological assessments for her daughter through the department. Carol has contacted the department and is waiting to hear back on next steps. RD Secchiaroli explained that there are different agencies who have trained staff who are able to conduct these assessments, and unfortunately, they are not always as thorough as he would like. RD Secchiaroli explained that the department is in the process of hiring a Director of Assistive Technology. This posting was posted nationwide, and the candidate pool is incredibly competitive.

RD Secchiaroli explained that Deputy Commissioner Elisa Velardo has mentioned in the forum that the department is looking to outfit its Respite Centers that are not used seven days a week as Smart Homes, so they can be used as show cases for families.

RD Secchiaroli explained that a portion of the forum revolved around the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding the department received. RD Secchiaroli explained that the department is utilizing these funds in numerous ways, infusing money into private providers to help stabilize them and increasing their reimbursement rates to help them pass on the funding to attract great candidates to fill vacancies. RD Secchiaroli explained that some of the ARPA initiatives involve trying to incentivize some providers to do some

transformative work, geared more towards independent and individualized supports as apposed to bigger Day Programs and congregate settings.

RD Secchiaroli began discussion on Supported Housing Projects, which are apartment complexes that are being developed with units set aside for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). There will be a provider attached to these units to help assist when needed, around the clock 24/7.

The department has four in the South Region that are in various stages of being built and or approved for construction. One is in Pawcatuck Connecticut, one is in New London Connecticut, one is in Orange Connecticut, and the last is in the Westville section of New Haven Connecticut. RD Secchiaroli explained that if families or loved ones are interested in the Supported Housing Initiative to please contact their Case Manager and let them know. RD Secchiaroli explained that funds will be set aside for individuals to move into these units.

The last portion of the agenda covered council vacancies and officer elections. Mr. Abrahamsson explained to the council that Noreen Hills will be taking over this task, and to please email Noreen should they be interested in serving as an officer on the council.

Mr. Abrahamsson also explained that there is one vacancy left to fill on the council, and to please contact Noreen if any of the RAC members are aware of someone who may be interested in serving on the council.

With that the meeting came to an end, and a vote was held to adjourn at approximately 7:15PM.

Nothing Follows //

Minutes recorded by:
Gunnar Abrahamsson
Regional Executive Secretary