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Department of Developmental Services

South Region



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South Region Director

**South Region Regional Advisory Council (RAC)  
Meeting Minutes  
June 14, 2023  
Guilford Free Library, 67 Park St., Guilford**

**Attendees:** Lynn Arezzini, Carol Cooney, Nancy Kalal, Diane Martin, Erin McGuire, Haley Parent, Cres Secchiaroli, SR Regional Director; Noreen Hills, Executive Secretary

**Guests attending:** April Dipollina, Trever Rogers

**Call to Order:**

Lynn Arezzini brought the meeting to order at 6:05p. Introductions were made.

**Approval of May Meeting Minutes:**

Lynn asked for a motion to approve the South Region RAC May 17, 2023 minutes. Diane Martin put forth the motion and Nancy Kalal seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

**Citizen Comments:**

April Dipollina inquired about the private provider direct care strike. Regional Director (RD) Cres Secchiaroli stated that the strike update will be part of the Regional Director's Updates.

**Customized Employment Services:**

Trever Rogers, DDS Transition Advisor, presented the initiative regarding customized employment services to the Council. The PDF of the presentation will be sent to the RAC members after the meeting.

**Regional Director's Update:**

Private Provider Strike – RD Secchiaroli reported that as of 3:50a today, the final provider has settled the strike negotiations. The strike is officially over, although the union mandated that they have a re-opener next year. The strike impacted six (6) providers (5 of which are in the South Region), 200 group homes, 800 individuals, and 1,700 private provider staff. DDS will continue monitoring through Friday, June 16, 2023. DDS Managers volunteered to conduct monitoring, as well as DDS unionized staff.

While the strike was happening, DDS met with the affected private providers daily to discuss any problems or issues their homes may be experiencing. DDS will be sending a survey to those providers as a follow up on how DDS performed and supported them during the strike.

Wallingford Office

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Legislative Session – The Legislative session has ended, and House Bill 5001 and the budget have passed. DDS’s annual budget is \$1.5B, which is 6.5% of the State’s total budget of \$23B. This a very positive for DDS, as approximately half of 1% of the population is supported by DDS. The budget includes funding for help with the Wait List. The budget also calls for nine (9) additional Transition Advisors to be hired to help support families and individuals transitioning to the various services. The budget includes a 2.5% COLA that the Legislature increased to 7% with the addition of \$50M, which will bring the minimum wage for direct care workers up to \$18.25 per hour. Diane Martin asked if this will change the salary scale for direct hires. RD Secchiaroli stated that majority of the direct hires, those who have worked with the same individual(s) for over 6 months, have received a \$250 bonus for vacation time through the fiscal intermediaries.

Positions – DDS has hired several new positions and has been able to fill positions that have been vacant for some time.

- Director of Housing – Elba Caraballo has been hired as DDS’s Director of Housing. This position is a first for DDS. The service delivery model for housing has changed with a variety of services that includes Section 8, Rental Assistance Programs (RAP), etc.
- Director of Assistive Technology – Patricia Cymbala has been hired as the Director of Assistive Technology for DDS.
- Director of Children Services – A new division has been created to include a Director of Children Services. The division is still in the development stages and is being designed to support and plan child transition services. A question was posed if the child has to be of a certain age. RD Secchiaroli explained that the child needs to be eligible for DDS services, which is determined before the child turns 18 years old.
- Director of Quality Assurance – Each region has hired a Director of Quality Assurance. Central Office has a Quality Division that provides oversight to the private providers. This position will focus on DDS’s internal systems, review data for trends, abuse and neglect, etc., for the regions. South Region has hired Kathryn Caristo-Scalora and will ask her to attend the September RAC meeting.
- There have been some structural reporting changes within the region:
  - Director of Quality Assurance will now have reporting to them: Abuse/Neglect Liaison and PRAT Manager.
  - Director of Health Services will now have the Clinical Services, which includes psychology reporting to them.
  - Self Determination Director will be reporting to the Assistant Regional Director for the IFS (Individual and Family Support) Program. IFS is DDS’s largest division which supports 66% of the DDS population.

### **Council Open Discussion:**

April Dipollina asked if someone living in a CLA can hire independent staff to take them out on evenings and weekends? Due to the staffing shortage, her daughter is unable to be out in the community as much as she’d like. RD Secchiaroli explained that we can’t approve additional residential funds although day program funding could be used as recreation during the day. An individual can use their own money to hire someone to provide a service within the home. RD Secchiaroli suggested working with the team and the provider to have a person come into the home to provide services such as massage therapy, music therapy, etc.

Lynn Arezzini will be attending the Assistive Technology conference that will be taking place to see what new technology could be available for our individuals.

Officer Elections – The Council decided to table the elections until the September RAC meeting.

Council Vacancies – Nancy Kala brought forth a motion and Erin McGuire seconded to accept the nomination of Kathryn Haaland for a second term on the South Region RAC Council. All in favor, motion passed. The members will work on soliciting new members, which will include a self-advocate.

**New Business:**

Lynn Arezzini asked RD Secchiaroli if they could visit one of the new supported housing projects in New London or Orange? RD Secchiaroli will set up a visit closer to the opening of the projects. The ARC of Eastern CT is supporting the New London project, and Midstate ARC will be supporting the Orange and Westville projects. The guidelines for living in one of these projects has a very broad spectrum. Anyone interested should talk with their case manager.

There being no further business, Nancy Kalal made a motion and Diane Martin seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:36p. All in favor, motion passed.

Nothing Follows //

Minutes recorded by:

Noreen Hills

Regional Executive Secretary