



State of Connecticut  
Department of Developmental Services



South Region

Ned Lamont  
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff  
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo  
Deputy Commissioner

Cres Secchiaroli  
South Region Director

**South Region Regional Advisory Council (RAC)  
Meeting Minutes  
May 17, 2023  
Guilford Free Library, 67 Park St., Guilford**

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

**Guests Attending:** David Arezzini, April Dipollina, Jacob Earle, Julia Earle, Jeffrey Postolowski, Twila Skelly

**Call to Order:**

Lynn Arezzini brought the meeting to order at 6:07p. Introductions were made.

**Approval of January and April Meeting Minutes:**

Lynn asked for a motion to approve the South Region RAC January 18, 2023 and April 19, 2023 meeting minutes. Nancy Kalal put forth the motion and Carol Cooney seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

**Citizens Comments:**

April Dipollini asked Regional Director (RD) Cres Secchiaroli about how the state is addressing the nationwide shortage of direct care workers. RD Secchiaroli responded that DDS is addressing it multiple ways:

- ARPA funds (American Rescue Plan Act)
- STEP Initiative to help people in independent settings. There are 7 different ‘steps’ that DDS is working towards to try to shift labor/staff intensive to more community support. Central Office has hired a Assistive Technology Director, Patricia Cymbala.
- Increased reimbursements rates for private providers. Increases were tied directly to direct care workers to increase the minimum hiring rate to \$15 per hour with more increases in the Governor’s budget to have the minimum hiring rate increased to \$17.50 per hour.

RD Secchiaroli explained that there are 25,000 private provider employees that provide direct services to 17,000 individuals with ID across the state. DDS’s budget is 5% of the total state budget. A question was posed that if a provider is understaffed, does the state step in? RD Secchiaroli responded, yes. If DDS hears of an issue, then they will step in and can put the provider on immediate jeopardy, and we will work with the provider to correct the issues.

Diane Martin asked if the individual’s LON (Level of Need) contributes to the amount allowed for services? RD Secchiaroli stated that the LON does have consideration and we work with the family and/or provider.

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Twila Skelly wanted to stress the importance of proper dental health and follow through for the individuals. Her daughter has had oral hygiene issues and now has no teeth. RD Secchiaroli explained that DDS has four (4) dental clinics: Ella Grasso Center, Southbury Training School, Lower Fairfield County Regional Center, and Norwich. He suggested to reach out the Dental Coordinator, Izabella Pulvermacher, at Central Office to help coordinate complex dental needs. Twila stated that it takes a lot of advocacy and there's a backlog for appointments.

### **Regional Director's Update:**

Private Provider Strike – RD Secchiaroli explained that there are six (6) private agencies that have been alerted that their staff will be striking: Oak Hill, Alternative Services, Caring Community, Mosaic, Whole Life, and Network. This will affect 200+ private group homes. Staff are advocating for more pay, insurance and pension benefits. Call your legislator, senator and the Governor's office if you have a family member supported by an agency that will be striking.

Legislation – The Speaker of the House has put forward House Bill 5001 that has the prime focus of supporting DDS and individuals we support with no budgetary cuts and calls for expansion.

STEP – Supporting Transformation to Empower People is a new initiative to provide a variety of service options that can help an individual reach their goals, to be more independent. Private providers are submitting plans for appropriate supports for individuals. The STEP core supports are:

- Self-direction
- Community Companion Home
- Supportive Housing
- Individualized Home Support
- Assistive Technology
- Remote Support
- Employment

Lynn has been attending all the STEP meetings and has learned new information including self direction can be integrated with some of the other supports.

### **Council Open Discussion:**

Council Vacancies – Erin McGuire nominated a new member to the Council, Jeffrey Postolowski. He has a son with autism and would like to get more involved with the South Region RAC. Erin McGuire made a motion and Carol Cooney seconded to accept the nominations for membership:

Jeffrey Postolowski – 1<sup>st</sup> term

Lynn Arezzini – 2<sup>nd</sup> term

Erin McGuire – 2<sup>nd</sup> term

All in favor, motion passed. The nominations for members will be presented to the Commissioner for his approval. The Council will work on filling the member vacancy for a self advocate.

Officer Elections – RD Secchiaroli suggested keeping the current officers in place until the membership vacancies can be filled. The Council agreed.

### **New Business:**

RD Secchiaroli stated that he has participated in different regional RACs and enjoys the interaction with the South Region RAC. Diane stated that she appreciates RD Secchiaroli's openness.

The next South Region RAC meeting is scheduled for June 14, 2023. Trever Rogers will give a presentation on Customized Employment.

**Adjournment:**

Diane Martin made a motion to adjourn the South Region RAC at 7:20p and Carol Cooney seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

Nothing Follows //

Minutes recorded by:

Noreen Hills

Regional Executive Secretary