



State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services

DDS

January 12, 2022

Testimony On Proposed DDS Five-Year Plan 2022-2027

Pursuant to the duties of the Council as established under the provisions of sections 17a-270 and 17a-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Council shall consider and advise on such matters as its members, the Board of Trustees of the Southbury Training School and the Commissioner of Developmental Services may request. The Council shall consult with the Commissioner of Developmental Services on the administration of the state program for persons with intellectual disability. Section 17a-270 C.G.S.

The Commissioner shall be responsible, with the advice of the Council, for: (1) Planning and developing complete, comprehensive and integrated state-wide services for persons with intellectual disability; (2) the implementation and where appropriate the funding of such services; and (3) the coordination of efforts of the Department of Developmental Services with those of other state departments and agencies, municipal governments and private agencies concerned with and providing services for persons with intellectual disability. Section 17a-210 C.G.S.

The Council has taken the time to review the proposed Five-Year Plan for the years 2022-2027. The Council recognizes the challenges and opportunities the department faces during this time and supports the aspirations and themes outlined in the plan.

The Department of Developmental Services serves persons with many levels of need. Therefore, the Department needs to provide an array of services that meet the needs of this diversified population. The plan includes a chart showing a breakdown of those eligible for DDS services by age. The plan should address the needs of individuals older than 74 and also include a chart of the levels of need (LON) of individuals served to illustrate the varied needs of the population.

The Department should be commended for its efforts to keep programs and services intact while ensuring the health and safety of participants and staff. Private providers received provider stability payments in order for them to maintain their physical and human infrastructure. Flexibility and stability payments have been, and will continue to be, critical as the pandemic continues. During the public health emergency, Appendix K, a stand-alone Appendix to Medicaid, was utilized to provide flexibility for waiver services, including compensation for guardians furnishing care for persons with IDD. Perhaps, a permanent amendment to our waivers could be sought to provide additional flexibility in the future.

The Federal Government has awarded significant funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. These funds provide an opportunity to address some of the issues for the Department. The proposed use of these funds should be included in the plan such as staff recruitment and retention; implementation of assistive technology and innovation in employment & residential services.

The need for a comprehensive workforce development plan for direct support professionals (DSP) and supervisors in the public and private sectors is essential. These workers are the backbone of any program or service provided by the Department. Additionally, the recruitment and retention of nurses must be part of the workforce plan to ensure the provision of timely health care and adequate numbers of certified staff to administer medication.

The Council supports the continued provision and expansion of residential options to support the differing needs of the population. Agencies are reluctant to initiate new programs at this time, due to shortages in staffing which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. However, the Council urges agencies to consider the creation and support of residential communities within this five-year plan. Emphasis must be placed on creating opportunities for those individuals with complex medical and behavioral needs and families under extreme strain.

Day program services have also been adversely impacted by the COVID pandemic. Programs that include life enrichment and other community opportunities have been severely limited due to this public health crisis. Employment opportunities have been curtailed with a reluctance on the part of employers to hire or retain individuals that we serve due to liability and or health concerns. Hopefully, as we recover from this situation, creative employment and day program opportunities will emerge utilizing newly acquired technology and other skills learned by individuals during the pandemic. The Council also hopes that Departmental grants and State incentives will be made to promote new employment.

The Department continues to strive to serve persons on the residential and day program waiting lists by matching individuals with available vacancies. Persons on the autism spectrum eligible for DDS services, continue to be underserved. Some of these individuals require intensive supports.

In an effort to communicate effectively and efficiently with families and individuals served by the Department, the Council suggests reinstating a newsletter similar to the previous newsletter entitled "Direct to Families". This electronic newsletter would provide timely updates and information in a cost-effective manner. Efforts to increase equitable communication can be achieved through refinements to the existing DDS website, use of email and social media for the sharing of important information, including a more user-friendly, accessible email system for communication between Families and Case Managers.

The Council acknowledges the adoption of the organizational framework of the Charting the LifeCourse initiative and embraces the inclusion of participants, to the best of their ability, in the planning process. This new process aligns with the mission of the department to support lifelong planning and encourages greater consideration of the aspirations and desires expressed by each individual.

In conclusion, The Five-Year Plan is a strategic plan identifying the future needs, goals and objectives of the Department. This plan should be a living document that is re-visited by The Department, the Council and other stakeholders on an annual basis to review and revise the priorities.

Respectfully,

The DDS Council on Developmental Services *Members:*

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