

Testimony on DDS 2022-27 Draft Strategic Plan

January 11, 2022

My name is Susan Lucek-Hughes and I am from Tolland. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the draft five-year plan developed by the Department of Developmental services. While I am pleased to know that the department has identified goals for the agency, it is more important than ever that DDS address the specific real-life needs of the individuals served by the department.

As the parent of a young adult with physical and intellectual disabilities, this plan is critical to the future health and wellbeing of my child. Ensuring that our loved ones can live in a supported and inclusive community environment is essential and the programs and services developed by the DDS must reflect this approach.

Our voices provide important feedback and highlight the need for additional resources. No longer do we live in a one-size fits all world. In fact, we can learn from the approach of other states and create new, supported living environments and options. Specifically, this plan should be revised to include:

- More individualized, supported living options,
- Resources to support person-centered planning, realistic employment progression and affordable community-based housing options,
- Increased training for families and support personnel,
- Improved medical and behavioral emergency support,
- Increased collaboration opportunities with DDS for supported individuals and their families.

In addition, while the goals as presented are appropriate and well-meaning, this plan lacks the specific tactics, measurements and accountability that will enable progress (or lack thereof) to be measured. How can you achieve

something without identifying the steps you need to take to get there?

I would also like to provide input regarding communication with clients and their families. AKA, the people who are being served. As a caregiver, I rely on the DDS website and email communications to stay abreast of changes, opportunities and news relevant to my family's situation. These communications are woefully lacking. Example: The regional RAC meetings are designed for families in my region to voice concerns and provide input to our regional DDS coordinator, yet there is no alert/communication to us (or anyone) with the meeting invitation/dial-in instructions. So, no one knows about these meetings... I've been told to "go on the website", but the information isn't posted in advance, if at all. DDS needs to implement a better email list service and delivery platform that enables effective, timely communication with ALL clients.

And then there's the DDS website. No one answers the phone, the least you can do is keep the website up to date. The DDS website has so many layers, it's easiest to just use the search tool, but that pulls up such completely outdated information, it's almost useless. Examples:

- IDPAC – last updated 1-2020?
- Welcome to the World of Waivers – info on STS funding...really??

DDS serves people with disabilities. The DDS website should be clean, up to date and easy to navigate, and it's not. Since DDS clients and caregivers need to utilize it, and depend on it, for accurate information, it needs to be a priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I look forward to your feedback, seeing the revised plan and the opportunity to work together in this process.

Respectfully,

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Susan