

The 2014 session of the Connecticut General Assembly saw an unprecedented level of advocacy by families of individuals who live with intellectual disabilities. The Arc Connecticut organized a group of families under that banner of "Families for Families" while the SEIU District 1199 organized the group "Our Families Can't Wait." The Family Empowerment Task Force continued doing what we do best - connecting people and getting the word out through our Internet Groups and Newsletter.

This session included a number of important legislative initiatives:

- A **new Intellectual and Development Disabilities (ID/DD) Caucus** was formed to advocate for individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities.

- AN ACT MAKING **ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015**, was passed.

- The **collective bargaining agreement** between the Personal Care Attendant Workforce Council and the New England Health Care Employees Union (District 1199, SEIU) was approved.

- An Act **expanding eligibility for supportive housing initiatives** to clients of the Department of Developmental Services was passed.

- AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY was raised and received a public hearing but was not reported out of committee.

- AN ACT ELIMINATING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE EXCEPTION was raised and received a public hearing but was not reported out of committee.

By far the most important of these actions was H.B. No. 5596 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2015, which will cut the budget for DDS personnel by \$4.3 million; **increase DDS Family Support Grants by \$0.6 million; increase DDS Employment Opportunities and Day Services by \$0.4 million; and increase DDS Community Residential Services by \$5 million.** For comparison, DDS estimated that \$4.1 million would be needed to serve the 37 individuals on the Emergency Waiting List and \$59 million would be required to serve the 598 individuals on the Priority 1 Waiting List. The legislative Office of Fiscal Analysis estimated that the DDS budget would have to be increased by about \$182 million in order to provide all eligible individuals with residential services. This budget appears to be \$1 million short of the funds needed for the new Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Many families worked very hard this year with our state legislature to gain an additional \$5.6 million ostensibly to provide residential placements or in-home supports for individuals currently living with caretakers. **Now we must be diligent to insure that this money is actually spent as we expect.** The workings of the Waiting List, the PRATs and DDS operations in general are obscure - and there are other unfunded mandates such as the wage increase for private PCAs that must now be paid from the limited budgets for home and community based services.

Perhaps the most enduring event this year was the formation of the Intellectual and Development Disabilities (ID/DD) Caucus. The Caucus, which is led by

Senator Beth Bye and Representatives Jay Case and John Hampton has been meeting since early February and has held several informational sessions where families have shared their stories. While the caucus didn't formally introduce any legislation in 2014, they have started the conversation to analyze policy for next year. The Caucus will continue meeting through the summer and fall months while a vast majority of lawmakers are taking time off.

The new collective bargaining agreement affects families who self-direct Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) under the DDS Individual and Family Support and Comprehensive Waivers. In DDS, "PCA" means personal support, individual home support, individual day support, adult companion and respite workers. The **contract establishes new, higher wage ranges for these workers and a \$0.40 per hour wage increase retroactive to January 1, 2014.** The lowest wage for these workers is now \$10 per hour at the minimum for Adult Companion and Respite workers. The highest wage is now \$22.35 per hour at the maximum for Individual Supports, Home or Day. The contract also provides unemployment benefits, paid time off, training, orientation and other rights. Workers who decide not to join the union are required to pay an agency fee. As noted above, the adjustments to the FY 2015 DDS budget are not sufficient to cover these wage increases so some other DDS services may be reduced in order to pay these higher wages and benefits.

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISIONS TO THE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING INITIATIVE STATUTE expands eligibility for supportive housing initiatives and adds the Department of Developmental Services to the list of agencies collaborating on the permanent supportive housing initiatives under Sec. 17a-485c of the state statutes, which **authorizes the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to underwrite development projects for permanent supportive housing** initiatives. This may enable some creative housing solutions for individuals who live with intellectual disabilities.

AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY would have required DDS to produce a plan to provide all eligible individuals with residential services. The public hearing on this bill provided another opportunity for families to impress our legislators with the severity of our situations. The fiscal note to this bill estimates that the annual budget for DDS would have to be increased by about \$182 million in order to provide all eligible individuals with residential services. This cost estimate is limited to the individuals who are currently on the Waiting Lists as reported in the DDS Management Information Report (MIR). It does not consider DDS clients who have not yet requested residential services nor does it consider the larger population of eligible adults who have not yet registered with DDS. As noted above, the new FY 2015 budget added only \$5.6 million for DDS to provide residential placements or in-home supports for individuals currently living with caretakers.

Raised H.B. No. 5279 would have eliminated the minimum fair wage exception for individuals with impaired capacity. Most testimony was by private providers who opposed this bill on the grounds that they could not employ these workers at minimum wage so the alternative would be no jobs at all. Some other states have successfully eliminated this exception and still provide good employment opportunities and day programs for adults who live with intellectual disabilities. The public hearing ended with discussion of the need for better data on this issue and the possibility of a transition period that would allow DDS insure that no workers would lose beneficial day activities due to a minimum wage requirement.

### **Join us on the Internet!**

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Facebook: CT DDS Family Empowerment Task Force  
YAHOO: [HTTP://GROUPS.YAHOO.COM/GROUP/FAMILY-EMPOWERMENT/](http://GROUPS.YAHOO.COM/GROUP/FAMILY-EMPOWERMENT/)  
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YOU MAY SUPPORT THE FETF WITH A DONATION TO OUR FISCAL AGENT, RAISING VOICES FOR ACTION, INC. MAKE YOUR CHECK PAYABLE TO RAISING VOICES FOR ACTION, INC. AND MAIL YOUR DONATIONS TO THE FETF, 17 C WOODLAND STREET, VERNON, CT 06066.

### **ABOUT THE FETF**

The Family Empowerment Task Force (FETF) is an informal, unincorporated, organization of parents, siblings, guardians, caregivers and self-advocates that works to sustain, enhance and grow the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) that are offered by DDS through its private provider network by: 1) Developing a supportive network of families and individuals who receive services; 2) Educating families about DDS services; and 3) Educating legislators and public officials about the needs of families