

The 2014 general elections left the landscape in Hartford essentially unchanged. Dannel P. Malloy is still our governor and he maintains his pledges not to raise taxes and not to impose deep cuts in critical social programs. Ben Barnes is still Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management. The Majority in the Connecticut General Assembly is unchanged. The ID-DD Caucus is intact. The 2015 Connecticut General Assembly convenes on Wednesday, January 7, 2015, and the Governor will deliver his biennial budget proposal to the legislature at the beginning of February.

The Governor has announced that he will probably be making no more than six changes in his administration, including commissioners and deputy commissioners.

The Governor announced \$5.5-million rescissions from the FY 2015 DDS budget. There are no cuts to residential programs. Most of the cuts are in staffing, which means no additional caseworkers and large caseloads, and in day services, which will be realized in the form of reduced payments to private providers.

The 2015 Connecticut General Assembly will create the state budgets for FY 2016 – FY 2017 under the cloud of projected billion-dollar annual deficits. In the 2014 Assembly we learned that DDS needs nearly \$200 million added to its budget in order to serve all those eligible and in need of its services yet the legislature provided only \$4 million to provide just six months of assistance to 100 individuals on the Priority 1 Waiting List. We now need at least \$8 million added to the annual budget to sustain services for those 100 people and much more to address the hundreds of others on the Waiting Lists and to mitigate the Governor's rescissions. **Now is the time to contact your legislators!** You can find your state legislators at: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CGAFindLeg.asp>

Private providers of DDS Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) are due for rate adjustments in January 2015. HCBS are Medicaid services. The state must pay all providers of a specific Medicaid service the same rate yet DDS currently pays different rates to different providers for the same service. The legislature concluded, "The existing DDS payment system is incompatible with the federal [Medicaid] requirements for waiver services and places the state at risk of federal recoupment of funds and/or loss of future reimbursement. The risks of a failure to act to ensure compliance will result in a loss of [hundreds of] millions of dollars in federal reimbursement, increase costs to the state, and jeopardize services to people with disabilities, their families and the provider network that supports them." Without an increase in the funding for these services all providers must be paid at the average of the current rates. **Some agencies will get increases and others will see decreases.** This is simple arithmetic. In order to pay more to our private providers, the legislature must appropriate more funds or OPM must reallocate funds from other parts of the budget.

The Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has issued new rules for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). **Under the new rules CMS will only authorize funding of HCBS in settings that:**

- are integrated in and support full access to the greater community, including opportunities to seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings, engage in community life, control personal resources, and receive services in the community;
- are selected by the individual from among options, including non-disability specific settings and an option for a private unit;
- ensure individual rights of privacy, dignity, and respect and freedom from coercion and restraint;
- optimize autonomy and independence in making life choices;
- facilitate individual choice of services and supports and who provides them;
- provide a lease or other enforceable agreement providing similar protections;
- ensure individuals privacy in their living or sleeping units;
- allow individuals who share units a choice of roommate in that setting;
- allow individuals to furnish and decorate their own units;
- allow individuals to control their own schedules and activities; and
- allow individuals to have visitors of their choosing at any time.

There will be informational forums on December 11 at The Arc Meriden Wallingford and on December 15 at the LOB in Hartford. For more details email family-empowerment@comcast.net.

The DDS Family Advocacy Coalition and Training Supports (FACTS) committee, which includes representatives from the Family Empowerment Task Force (FETF), Families for Families (FFF) and Our Families Can't Wait (OFCW) and many others, met in November and DDS explained the process by which legislative proposals are developed. Most DDS proposals are technical changes to existing state statutes and all legislative proposals from DDS must be approved by the Governor's Office of Policy and Management (OPM). DDS cannot advocate proposals at odds with the Governor's office. For this reason, **legislative advocacy by citizens' groups such as the FETF, FFF and OFCW is critical.** Consumer advocates can promote new initiatives much more effectively than state agencies. The DDS FACTS group will meet again on December 4, when advocacy groups will share our legislative proposals.

Our Families Can't Wait (OFCW) is sponsoring a series of family forums with state legislators. For more information call 860-251-6048 or email ofcw@outlook.com. OFCW is also sponsoring an online petition for increased funding at: <http://ofcw.org/dds-funding-cant-wait-petition/>

Families for Families (FFF) is sponsoring a series of Family Advocacy Workshops where you can learn how to work with other families and lawmakers to create a support system that works for all people with intellectual disabilities. Contact Shannon Jacovino at sjacovino@hearct.org or 860 874-8100.

Join us on the Internet

Website: <http://family-empowerment.weebly.com>

Facebook: CT DDS Family Empowerment Task Force

YAHOO: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/family-empowerment/>

EMAIL: family-empowerment@comcast.net

About the FETF

The **Family Empowerment Task Force (FETF)** is an informal, independent, 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 CT DDS 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.