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Governor

State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

Peter H. O'Meara
Commissioner

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Deputy Commissioner

TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES
TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
February 27, 2009

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee. I am Peter O'Meara, Commissioner of Developmental Services. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **SB 548, An Act Concerning Residential Placement of Adult Autistic Children.**

First, I would like to provide you with a little background regarding the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). DDS provides services and supports to individuals with mental retardation. Services are not an entitlement, but rather are provided based upon available appropriations and allocated based upon individual level of need. In order to be eligible for DDS services, individuals must meet the definition of mental retardation pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 1-1g. Thus, aside from the Autism Pilot Program which was recently established, an individual with autism would also have to have a diagnosis of mental retardation in order to be eligible for services from the department.

Once an individual is eligible for services, there is a process in place to determine any potential allocation of resources. Each of DDS's three regions has a Planning and Resource Allocation Team (PRAT) who review all requests for funding and residential placements. In order to fairly allocate a limited amount of resources, priority determinations are made by using a standard Priority Checklist and a very comprehensive Level of Need (LON) Tool.

In most cases, once a vacancy has been identified by the region, PRAT will make up to 3 appropriate referrals to a provider and request a response within a 3 week timeframe. In other cases, if an individual has been assigned resources, they are able to choose among qualified providers, and families are encouraged to participate in the selection process. In either instance, a transition period is always part of the process and might include a visit to the home for a meal, an overnight visit or two until the consumer, the provider and the family are comfortable with making the official move.

It appears that SB 548 is attempting to require not less than two months advance notice of a residential placement to a parent of an individual with autism who is eligible for DDS services.

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From the department's perspective, this will be a potential problem for private providers in terms of their funding for residential community living arrangement (CLA) or "group home" placements. In actuality, private providers continue to ask DDS to shorten the time period for filling vacancies as a result of the current referral and selection process. Requiring an additional two months once a final decision is made and the family is notified, will result in an additional 60 days without funding for either services or room and board from the Department of Social Services.

While we certainly understand a family's need to be comfortable with a residential placement of their son or daughter, the need for services by those on the waiting list clearly requires us to move as fast as possible while providing a safe and appropriate transition for the consumer and the family.

Interestingly, we usually hear the opposite concern, that placements don't happen fast enough for families because of the non-entitlement aspect of the program and the limited amount of resources the department has to work with to address the needs of many.

We appreciate the intent of the bill and would be happy to talk further about this issue, but we believe that this type of legislation would not be a good solution. Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns with SB 548. Please contact Christine Pollio, DDS Director of Legislative and Executive Affairs at (860) 418-6066 if you have any questions.