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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
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
March 17, 2010

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am Peter O'Meara, Commissioner of Developmental Services. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to **Senate Bill No. 424, An Act Concerning Agency Consolidation and the Creation of the Health and Human Services Consolidation Steering Committee.**

This bill would establish a steering committee to submit recommendations to the Government Administration and Elections Committee on the consolidation of the Departments of Children and Families, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Social Services, Public Health and Developmental Services into a super agency called the Department of Human Services with a multi-billion dollar budget. The outcomes of this steering committee have been prescribed in section (d) of the bill which says that "the committee shall develop a five-year plan for the consolidation of the agencies listed in subsection (a) of this section that would involve the transfer of all affected state employees in accordance with section 4-38d of the general statutes and not permit any state employee to be laid off as a result of such consolidation. Such plan would also ensure that no existing programs of said agencies are affected by the consolidation."

The GAE Committee appears to have determined that the correct approach to human services provision in Connecticut is through a consolidation and has left the details of how the consolidation should be accomplished to the departments. DDS disagrees with the premise that better service provision to very different populations is achieved when all populations requiring human services are housed under one roof. Yes, there may be economies of scale in a large agency but what happens to the focus each agency places on its particular set of consumers? What does a child involved with the juvenile justice system, or a person who needs a nursing license, or a person who needs to apply for SNAP benefits, or an individual who needs an emergency mental health placement have in common with a consumer with intellectual disabilities who receives respite services? If all a consolidation does is put a layer of bureaucracy called the Department of Human Services over the discreet functions of individual agencies than any savings will come at the expense of the public's ease of access to services, individual department accountability to the legislature and the public and department flexibility in developing new programs and services targeted to particular groups of consumers.

DDS also has a concern that if a super agency were to shift its focus away from persons with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorders and determine that another portion of its mandate needed its full resources, what would be the recourse for our consumers? Because developmental services are not entitlements there could be pressure during bad economic times to fund those human services mandates that are entitlements,

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while allowing other supports and services to languish. How will the competing priorities in a super agency be accommodated when the reason for the consolidation is savings? Also, the question can be raised that if no current programs can be cut and no employees can be let go, where are the efficiencies, and does this model of service provision stifle innovation and responsiveness in the development of programs and services?

DDS has a technical concern with the bill as well. In line 10, there is a reference to a Commissioner of Human Services as a member of the steering committee. The GAE Committee seems to anticipate that there would be a Department of Human Services sometime prior to the end of the five-year period when recommendations on consolidation are due to the legislature. In this case, S.B. 424 appears to be prescribing the outcomes of the steering committee's work.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns regarding Senate Bill No. 424. Please contact Rod O'Connor, DDS Legislative Liaison at (860) 418-6130 if you have any questions.