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A Healthcare Service Agency

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Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee
September 24, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and distinguished members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon on the subject of **Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder**. I am Cheryl Jacques, Director of the Young Adult Services Division in the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). DMHAS has been providing services to young adults with behavioral health and other co-occurring disorders, transitioning out of the DCF system for over 10 years. We now serve more than 1,000 young adults between the ages of 18 to 26 in this very specialized program. Many of the individuals who come to us have been in long-term residential programs, experienced severe trauma, have had repeated hospitalizations and all have a mental health diagnosis which makes them eligible for DMHAS services.

We also accept individuals with autism when there is a co-occurring mental illness or because their behavior is so problematic (sometimes with frequent emergency room visits) that we are asked to intervene and provide services to manage their symptoms. The needs of these individuals are very different from young adults with more traditional behavioral health needs. They require behavioral modalities that DMHAS is not traditionally well-equipped to provide. In order to assure our programming is adequate, we regularly consult with an interagency group consisting of the Departments of Developmental Services (DDS) (whose clinicians are better trained in behavior modification), Children and Families (DCF) and the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch

There are challenges in caring for this population. They often require high cost services (like residential treatment) and staff need to be specially trained in behavioral modalities. Behaviorists are a large component of DDS programming and their staff are accustomed to following behavioral plans for each individual they serve. The DMHAS service system does not traditionally function this way.

DDS has been designated the lead agency to coordinate the activities of agencies with responsibilities for providing services to persons diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. This coordination and planning is ongoing. As part of this coordination, DMHAS will further collaborate with DDS to develop specialized residential placements that incorporate the clinical specialties of both agencies and arrange more training to assure our staff is adequately trained to meet specific needs.

DMHAS and DSS have been working on the development of a new home and community-based Medicaid waiver program for individuals with neurodevelopment disabilities (including young adults with autism) within the Young Adult Services program which would permit federal reimbursement for services that are currently 100% state reimbursed. I can provide additional details about services and other concepts if you are interested.

As the state further develops the service system for individuals with autism spectrum disorder through the expansion of eligibility under the Medicaid program and funding for various pilot programs and waivers in DDS, DMHAS looks forward to further improving the part our agency plays in the services provided to this population through our young adult services program.

I am available for questions if you would like.