

Testimony of Amy L. Porter, Sc.D.
Department of Rehabilitation Services
Before the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

February 10, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor, and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Amy Porter, Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services. I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today as Governor Malloy's nominee for Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services, an agency that was created to bring together many aspects of disability services in the State of Connecticut. Our mission is to maximize opportunities for people with disabilities to live, learn and work independently.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Governor Malloy for once again nominating me to be Commissioner of this important agency. I would also like to thank you, the Committee, for the opportunity to describe my career and how it has prepared me for leading the continued development of this new department.

I have had the opportunity to work for the State of Connecticut for more than 15 years. My positions have varied, but all of them fall within the realm of disability services. My Connecticut state service followed seven years in New Hampshire state government. This combined experience in state government has all been in rehabilitation services. Rehabilitation looks at the whole person and focuses on independence and self-sufficiency. It creates a partnership between an individual with a disability and those who are working to help that individual achieve his or her goals. I've worked as a frontline counselor and also in many of the administrative areas of rehabilitation, including quality assurance, training, planning, grant writing, project management and overall program management.

One of my major areas of responsibility when I first came to Connecticut was planning. In this role, I was able to identify gaps in our service structure and successfully sought out federal grants to address these gaps. Over the course of ten years, these grants brought over \$30 million in federal dollars into Connecticut. With these dollars, we were able to create the Connect-Ability brand, add a new service of benefits counseling and build an in-state technical assistance center to provide information about disability and employment to jobseekers and employers alike. We continue to operate Connect-Ability as a public/private partnership. What makes Connect-Ability successful is that it represents a broad coalition of stakeholders, bringing together people with disabilities, advocacy organizations, state agencies and businesses to work on mutually identified and prioritized goals. I look forward to continuing these important programs and partnerships, building on the work already done with a continual focus on how we can improve services in the area of disability.

In addition to my work experience, I have been involved in many different facets of rehabilitation. My undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees have all been in the area of Rehabilitation Counseling and my doctorate included a specialization in disability policy. I have held adjunct faculty positions in two Master's level programs in Rehabilitation Counseling and I

participate in national committees in disability and rehabilitation. I also chair the Social Security Relationships Committee of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, the nation's leading organization of vocational administrators.

This background has helped me to build a solid foundation to use as our Department charts its course. The Department of Rehabilitation Services was created to align disability programs in Connecticut and create a stronger disability focus for services. We have a staff of approximately 450 and a budget of approximately \$75 million. Our services are diverse and our funding comes from both federal and state sources. The distribution is about one quarter state funding and three quarters federal funding.

While the agency itself is new, many of our programs have a long history. We have education programs that are helping us build the message of empowerment from very young ages, a myriad of programs that support independence in the community and employment programs designed to increase self-sufficiency. And we also have safety net programs that provide access to Social Security disability programs. I am excited by the opportunity to work with our partners to continue looking for the right mix of services to increase independence and self-sufficiency for Connecticut citizens with disabilities, while ensuring that people continue to have access to critical safety net programs.

With the input of the disability community, the agency staff and our many partners, we have made great strides in creating an effective and responsive Department. Some of the highlights from the past three years include the following:

- We built a coordinated, equitable strategic plan to guide our work, both at the department level and for our services to students and young adults with disabilities.
- We launched a Distance Learning Initiative, making an online training platform available to job seekers with disabilities, their families, educators, employers, state agency staff and other professionals.
- We created a new workforce model for job seekers with disabilities, responding to the needs of Connecticut businesses and connecting them to qualified job seekers with disabilities.
- In pursuit of our mission, in just the last year alone -
 - over 11,800 individuals received services in our employment programs,
 - approximately 5,400 people participated in Independent Living programs,
 - almost 50,000 hours of sign language interpreting services were performed, and
 - over 42,000 disability claims were processed.

We have caring, professional staff in all of our programs and I look forward to working with them as well as our partners as we continue to shape the future of disability services in Connecticut.

I appreciate your consideration of my nomination to continue leading the Department of Rehabilitation Services. Thank you for your time and I am happy to respond to any questions.