



**Testimony to Executive Legislative and Nominations Committee  
February 24<sup>th</sup> 2015**

**By Leslie Simoes, Executive Director, The Arc Connecticut**

Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee Confirmation Hearing  
Ms. Morna Murray, Commissioner of the Department of the Developmental Services

Thank you Senator Duff, Representative Janowski and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee for the opportunity to testify this afternoon.

My Name is Leslie Simoes and I am the executive director of The Arc Connecticut. The Arc is a 62-year old advocacy organization committed to protecting the basic civil basic rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and to promoting opportunities for their full inclusion in the life of their communities. We have 18 chapters throughout Connecticut providing direct support and services. We rose from family grass roots advocacy and have hundreds of families and individuals with disabilities actively involved in The Arc movement in Connecticut.

On behalf of The Arc Connecticut, our families, providers and board of directors, I urge this committee to confirm the appointment of Ms. Morna Murray as the commissioner of DDS. As the Governor stated in the announcement of Commissioner Murray's appointment. Ms. Murray is a longtime advocate and we need her advocacy as we work together to enhance the Department of Developmental Disabilities or DDS system for families and individuals with I/DD and those that support them. I also urge members of this committee to commit to work with The Arc, our families and providers along with the 2 trade organizations, other family groups, disability organizations and labor organizations on the broader challenges facing this department and the budget battle that lay ahead.

The mission of the Department of Developmental Disabilities or DDS is "to partner with individuals we support and their families to support lifelong planning and to join with others to create and promote meaningful opportunities for individuals to fully participate as valued members of their communities." The Arc supports this mission.

That being said, without adequate resources the department, no matter what the vision or strength of its leader or mission statement, it cannot and will not be able to meet the needs of individuals with I/DD, their families and those that support them. The continued underfunding and slow starvation of the provider support system and

the consistent denial of requests for assistance from families is a painful reality that appears to have no end date.

There are numerous challenges facing Commissioner Murray, a few are:

- There are over 2,000 families on the DDS Residential Waiting and Planning lists and the number of families on these 2 lists is increasing. We are grateful for the work of The I/DD Caucus last year and the \$4M assigned for 100 families on the Priority 1 Waiting List, but prior to 2014, no money had been allocated to these lists without a lawsuit in over 20 years. And yet again, the Governor's budget out last week neglects this population.
- How Connecticut supports individuals with I/DD is changing. The system was created on an expensive, outdated institutional model of care that cannot sustain itself. The previous DDS administration worked diligently to attempt improving and transforming systems of support but without the commitment of the administration and the resources necessary this task was not realized.
- Funding for supports and services are at risk at a federal level but no attempts have been made to address this impending crisis on a state level.
- We are facing an imminent crisis of increased demand as children on the autism spectrum with I.Q.'s higher than Connecticut's eligibility statute allows will be aging out of the school system at an alarming rate into an already fragile support system.
- The Department of Developmental Services budget is over 1 billion dollars so the likelihood of receiving budget increases for FY16/17 seems highly unlikely.
- For many years providers have been told to do more with less. Providers have been struggling for years to maintain quality supports for the individuals they support and their requests for more funding have been denied year after year.
- DDS is mandating families do more support with fewer resources while cutting and reducing the in home supports they rely on such as Family Support Grants, & Respite Services causing immense hardships.

The DDS budget is a little over 1 billion dollars and supports approximately 21,000 people. According to a FOI Request dated April 2014, DDS spends approximately \$380,000 per year per resident for 312 individuals living at Southbury Training School, \$420,000 per person per year for 191 individuals living at the 5 DDS Regional Centers, approximately \$360,000 per person per year for individuals in publically operated group homes and \$0.00 on residential supports for approximately 2,000 families on the DDS Residential Waiting and Planning Lists. This must end.

DDS has resources but they need to look at how they spend money and how we can reallocate existing resources in ways that will not only fully support all families in need across Connecticut but for the providers that support them. We look forward to

working with Commissioner Murray on these and other challenges facing the department.

Again, on behalf of The Arc Connecticut, our families, providers and board of directors, I urge this committee to confirm Ms. Murray's appointment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions and I thank you for your time and consideration.

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