State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

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Commissioner

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

February 10, 2015

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Human Services Committee. I am Morna A. Murray, J.D., Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding **H.B. No. 6714 - An Act Concerning Medicaid Funding to Provide or Expand Physical Activity Programs for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder.**

In section 1 of **H.B. No. 6714**, subsection (j) seeks either Medicaid coverage or a waiver amendment to provide or expand physical activity programs for persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to provide transportation for such persons to and from such programs. While it is difficult to know exactly what type of physical activity this language is referring to, DDS agrees that weight gain associated with a lack of physical activity for individuals with ASD is a serious problem. Research from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that adolescents with developmental disabilities are significantly more likely than others of a similar age to struggle with weight and that those with ASD are at greatest risk. The Division of Autism Spectrum Services currently operates a Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver that addresses the issue of a sedentary lifestyle in a number of ways. Community Mentoring is one example of a waiver service that benefits many of the waiver participants. Community mentors can be considered 'social coaches' for individuals with ASD. These mentors support individuals so they can access community activities such as hiking, cycling, swimming, or attending a gym. Another waiver service, Life Skills Coaching, allows life skills coaches to work with individuals with ASD to build adaptive skills, such as shopping for healthy foods and learning to cook a balanced meal. Transportation is another HCBS waiver service that is available for those individuals who demonstrate a need for this service and can currently be utilized for transport to physical activities.

If new services were proposed for the Medicaid State plan or as amendments to federal waivers, this would require an analysis of the fiscal impact. At this point, there is a waiting list for the Division's existing services, and DDS cannot anticipate additional resources for new services within the next two-year budget. Due to these reasons, the agency cannot support the bill at this time. However, DDS will carefully examine the HCBS waiver to determine that existing services to address excessive weight and the risks associated with it are fully understood by providers and utilized for those they serve.

I would like to mention that in subsection (b) the addition of "on the department's Internet website and the eRegulations System" is a redundant requirement for the Division of Autism

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Spectrum Disorder Services because DDS policies and procedures are posted on the DDS website and DDS regulations are posted on the DDS website through a link to the Secretary of the State's website: http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=4431&q=523128. The Division is in the process of drafting regulations, and when they have been approved by the legislature's Regulation Review Committee, these regulations will be posted with the Secretary of the State's office and linked to the DDS website.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on **H.B. No. 6714**. Please contact Christine Pollio Cooney, DDS Director of Legislative and Executive Affairs at (860) 418-6066, if you have any questions.