



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

Ned Lamont
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

Peter Mason
Deputy Commissioner

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
March 25, 2021**

Senators Moore and Berthel, Representatives Abercrombie and Case and members of the Human Services Committee, I am Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on **H.B. No. 6637 AN ACT CONCERNING STATE-WIDE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR DEAF, DEAF-BLIND AND HARD OF HEARING PERSONS.**

H.B. No. 6637 seeks to improve access for deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons to mental health services. Section 2 of the bill would establish a bill of rights for deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons in need of mental health services.

Section 3 would require the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), in consultation with DDS and other state agencies, to establish a state-wide mental health services program for deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons that delivers services in accordance with the provisions of the bill of rights as outlined in section 2 of the bill. This program of mental health services would include (1) regional service centers or options that provide for culturally and linguistically affirmative mental health services and accessible mental health services to deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons; (2) monitoring of all mental health programs to ensure that deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons of all ages are adequately served; (3) providing adequate state funding to ensure that the program provides appropriate mental health services to deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons; and (4) where there are insufficient mental health professionals adequately trained in any language, communication mode or style necessary to treat deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing persons, the development and implementation of strategies to address the treatment needs of such persons.

Subsection (c) of section 3 of the bill would require the Department of Developmental Services, along with other state agencies, to have a full-time staff position dedicated to implementing the provisions of this program. This staff member would be required to possess (1) a thorough understanding of the mental health needs of deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons; (2) competency in ASL and knowledge of the culture specific to the deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing community; (3) a master's degree in a behavioral health or related clinical field and preferably state licensure in a behavioral health or a related clinical field; and (4) not less than three years of experience providing mental health services to deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons. Subsection (d) of section 3 outlines other requirements that DMHAS (in consultation with DDS and other state agencies) would be required to implement the program including oversight of mental health providers, maximizing the use of state resources,

developing a state-wide network of providers, developing state-wide standards of care, and developing and implementing a policies, procedures and regulations for the program.

Section 4 of the bill would require DMHAS (in consultation with DDS and other state agencies) to establish an advisory committee to address the mental health service needs of deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing persons, including, but not limited to, (1) identifying gaps in the provision of services, necessary resources and funding, and (2) assisting in long-range planning to serve the mental health needs of such persons. Section 5 would allocate DMHAS \$100,000 for start-up costs for the program and the bill's other requirements.

Although many of the requirements of the bill would fall primarily on the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, there are a few requirements that also would impact DDS. One significant requirement is the provision that mandates state agencies hire a dedicated staff person to implement the provisions of the program outlined in the bill. Along with the requirement to hire a staff person, the bill also outlines the criteria of qualifications that staff person must have. DDS being the state's agency for services for persons with intellectual disability and other developmental disabilities, and not primarily being a mental health agency, would struggle to find someone who has a background and qualifications in intellectual disability, mental health provision, and the needs of the deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing community. DDS continues to provide accommodations for those individuals and their families who are deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing through approved contractors. If DDS were to hire someone for this dedicated position that person would not replace the need for these contracted services but would have his or her own duties and responsibilities for implementing the program. DDS does not have funding in the Governor's budget for this new position.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding [H.B. No. 6637](#) **AN ACT CONCERNING STATE-WIDE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR DEAF, DEAF-BLIND AND HARD OF HEARING PERSONS**. Please contact Rod O'Connor, DDS Legislative Liaison, by e-mail at rod.oconnor@ct.gov or by text at 860-883-0727 with any questions.