

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department on Disability Services**



Fiscal Year 2016-17 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Director

Before the

Committee on Human Services
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Brianne Nadeau, Chairperson

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Good morning Chairperson Nadeau, members and staff of the Committee on Human Services. I am Andrew Reese, the Director of the Department on Disability Services (DDS). Today, I am joined at the table with Dr. Pamela Downing-Hosten, the Deputy Director for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), and Thomas Jared Morris, the Deputy Director for the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). I am honored to testify today on the activities and accomplishments of the Department on Disability Services in Fiscal Year 2016 and fiscal Year 2017 to date.

Mayor Bowser's administration remains committed to investing in pathways to the middle class through investments in education, infrastructure, public safety and people. The Fair Shot budget for fiscal year 2017 was the first developed wholly under budget autonomy. For the first time since Home Rule was passed in 1973, the District was able to spend our local dollars without having to wait on Congress to pass the federal budget. This brings us one step closer to operating like the 51st state.

Last April, Mayor Bowser appointed me as the Director of the Department on Disability Services whose mission it is to provide innovative high quality services that enable people with disabilities to lead meaningful and productive lives as vital members of their families, schools, workplaces and communities in every neighborhood of the District of Columbia.

At this time last year, the District was optimistic about exiting the 40 year class action known as *Evans v. Bowser*. I am pleased to report that on January 10, 2017, Judge Huvelle of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia granted the parties joint motion to vacate all outstanding orders and the case was dismissed ending court oversight of the agency. This achievement was due in large part to the work and effort of so many people. We owe thanks to the Evans class members and their families, attorneys, judges, court officers, and other advocates

who worked tirelessly to improve our system so that people receive services in the least restrictive, most integrated settings available.

The kind of systems transformation DDA has experienced is only possible through interagency cooperation and collaboration. I thank the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services as well as our partner agencies including: the Department of Health Care Finance, the Department of Health, and the Office of Attorney General, who worked with us to reach the end of this case. It took a real investment in people with disabilities to get here, and for that I thank the Mayor and the Council for ensuring that DDS has had the resources it needs to build capacity and offer high quality community-based supports. In addition, I want to give special thanks to the DDS staff and providers, some of whom worked on this case since its inception, and others who over the years have spent countless hours ensuring not only compliance with the exit plan but also, improvements to our system so that the District is a place where residents with disabilities can pursue and realize self-sufficient, self-directed lives. The District of Columbia is a better place when there are opportunities for every resident, regardless of ability, to participate at every level and have equal rights.

Although federal court oversight via the Evans case has ended, it remains a priority that the agency maintains the system created to bring out the positive outcomes, not only for the Evans class members but everyone supported through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) and the agency as a whole. It is my commitment as Director to continue the incredible progress made, expand the person-centered approach and philosophy to foster inclusion and integration for people with disabilities, and increase stakeholder, staff and provider participation in decision-making and agency direction so that DDS is a truly person-centered

organization that incorporates the wealth of knowledge and experience from those who access services and the community of support givers.

Exiting the *Evans* litigation is a significant success for DDS but there is still work to be done to ensure that all people with intellectual disabilities in the District receive services in the least restrictive, most integrated settings and have opportunities for employment. In Fiscal Year 2016, DDS leveraged federal grant funding to build its internal capacity in person centered thinking (PCT) by training Learning Community certified PCT mentor trainers. These mentors then train and certify new PCT trainers and coaches. This reduces DDS's reliance on external subject matter experts while helping to ensure the sustainability of DDS's PCT work.

Beginning this fiscal year, DDS's new mentor trainers are working with five large day services providers in the District. This year long process of intensive PCT mentoring and coaching is aimed at building the capacity of staff within the programs to use person-centered thinking to better support community integration and meaningful days. The coaches will become the internal experts within each day program, to ensure that the provider agencies continue to make progress and provide person-centered supports.

Stakeholder and community engagement is critical to maintaining the gains in our service delivery system. DDS practices stakeholder and community engagement through the work with the Supporting Families Community of Practice, the Family Support Council, and the self-advocacy group Project ACTION!. Further community involvement is achieved through RSA's collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). The SRC was particularly helpful in the development of the vocational rehabilitation program specific portion of the District's four-year Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified State Plan, and RSA worked closely with the SILC and the DC

Center for Independent Living on development of the three-year State Plan for Independent Living that was submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on July 1, 2016.

Also, DDS formed an advisory group dedicated to assisting in the development of the agency's portion of the statewide transition plan to meet requirements of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Home and Community-Based Settings rule (HCBS Settings Rule) as well as our renewal of our HCBS Waiver, which provides supports to more than 1700 adults with intellectual disabilities. By way of background, CMS issued a final rule in March 2014 that contains new, outcome-oriented definitions of home and community-based services or HCBS settings. In part, this rule aims to ensure that people receive Medicaid HCBS services in settings that are integrated in and support full access to the greater community. This includes opportunities to seek employment and work competitively, engage in community life, control personal resources, and live actively in the community in the same way that you or I would.

The HCBS settings rule advisory group which includes people with disabilities, their families, advocates and providers, held a series of meetings to review all rules, regulations, certifications, service definitions and policies to determine where there are gaps or remediation is needed to comply with the rule. In partnership with other agencies, the statewide transition plan will be submitted to CMS in April, 2017 and our waiver renewal will be submitted in August 2017. For each, there will be ample opportunity for more public participation including public forums when the plan is published in the DC Register and via the agency website.

DDS will increase efforts to improve a person's readiness for employment. DDS has improved coordination of services between RSA and DDA, so that there are more people who

are jointly served by both administrations. At the beginning of this fiscal year, DDA changed its intake process, so that intake starts with a guided conversation aimed at discovering a person's interest in employment. People who are interested in employment are immediately referred to RSA, so that they can pursue services through DDA and RSA at the same time. DDS received a five year federal, Partners in Employment grant through the Administration on Community Living, which provides funding and subject matter expertise to improve employment opportunities for young people with intellectual disabilities.

It is important to highlight some of our cross-agency efforts and gains made to our system on account of receiving this grant. The focus of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) was to improve coordination of services across all workforce development agencies in a state, including vocational rehabilitation programs, the employment agency, school systems and the agencies that serve people with developmental disabilities and mental health impairments. RSA has worked closely with the Workforce Investment Council and all workforce agencies to better improve coordination at the American Job Centers. RSA has significantly improved coordination with DDA and DBH in the provision of supported employment services for people with intellectual disabilities and people with serious mental illness.

RSA has significantly improved coordination with the District's Public Schools (DCPS) and DC Public Charter Schools (DCPCS) to increase pre-employment transition services to youth in schools. WIOA requires 15 percent of public vocational rehabilitation funds to be used for pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for transition age students with disabilities who are potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. These services include: job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary

opportunities, workplace readiness training, and training on self-advocacy. To support this effort, RSA has funded three (3) workforce development coordinators and two (2) job placement specialists at DCPS. RSA also funded one secondary transition specialist at the Special Education Cooperative to assist in coordination of services and outreach to public charter schools.

Maintaining quality is a major priority for the agency. In the last fiscal year, DDS's comprehensive performance management program and quality management system were expanded to ensure continued monitoring of staff and the provision of services through our provider network. The agency has structural systems in place to enable appropriate individuals and inter-agency teams to work collaboratively to plan and implement initiatives, including targeted interventions to improve performance and quality.

Improving customer service is crucial to maintaining the quality of our system. DDS is using technology to improve its customer service approaches and establish a more robust electronic tracking system within this fiscal year that will facilitate better follow-up and tracking of the type, source and resolution of customer feedback. The system will track complaints by number, type, and responsible staff and engage supervisors to resolve issues. The ability to track trends over time allows the agency to address individual complaints and system-wide areas for improvement.

In closing, I want to thank you for your leadership and support. As always, the goal is to operate with complete transparency. I will ensure the communication channels with your staff remain open and productive.

This concludes my presentation. My staff and I are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.