



TESTIMONY BY
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CHAIR, D.C. DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES ROUNDTABLE
NOVEMBER 4, 2020

Thank you, Councilmember Nadeau and other members of the human services committee. My name is Carol Grigsby, and I come before you today as chair of the D.C. Developmental Disabilities Council, also known as the DD Council. I also am the mother of a 27-year-old young man receiving supports under the D.C. I/DD Medicaid waiver. The DD Council's role is to strengthen the voice of people with developmental disabilities and their families in DC in support of greater independence, inclusion, empowerment and the pursuit of life as they choose. We strive to create change that eliminates discrimination and removes barriers to full inclusion through our advocacy.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our views about management of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to DC residents with developmental disabilities and their families by DC agencies this committee oversees.

One of the DDC's main goals is to lift up the voices of people with developmental disabilities and their families. One thing we have heard over and over again during this pandemic from our community is that people are bored and have not been well supported to adjust to finding meaningful activities at home. We all have had to adjust and find new ways to create purpose and meaning in our lives over the last 7+ months, but this challenge is even greater for many people with disabilities who rely on others to find and participate in meaningful activities. For example, many people receiving DDA services did not have ready access to technology at the beginning of the pandemic. While many people have obtained technology in the last 7+ months, many people still do not know how to use it and do not have the ongoing support needed to engage with their community, family, and friends virtually. DDS stated on one of their Friday calls that they are not tracking or monitoring people's access to technology. Given that we are in a time when most people are connecting with community, family, medical care, etc. only through technology, we believe DDS should act intentionally to ensure that service providers and Direct Support Professionals are taking a creative and determined approach to community integration and connection to family, friends and activities through technology.

Early on in the pandemic, people with disabilities who receive services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) were being infected and dying at much higher rates than the general population. There was not quick action and guidance from DC Health and the Department on Disability Services (DDS) to limit exposure and control the spread of COVID-19 and many people – people receiving supports as well as provider staff - suffered as a result. There has been significant improvement since in this regard, and the regular Friday calls hosted by Director Reese have gone a long way toward keeping the community informed and permitting us to raise our concerns as they emerge. We have been happy that DC Health also has joined these calls, but as reflected in my testimony before the Committee on Health last week, we would like to see more robust consultation with DDS before issuance of DC Health guidance that affects people with developmental disabilities. We were disappointed that Dr. Nesbitt and Mr. Turnage were not questioned regarding the disability community and the unique effects covid-19 has presented for this community in the October 28 Committee on Health oversight hearing, and we sincerely hope that you and others serving on both committees will follow up with DC Health Director Nesbitt with respect to our concerns..

DDS director Reese also has led an important series of consultations over recent weeks that have focused on ensuring individuals' rights continue to be respected while appropriate covid-19 safeguards are in place to protect people receiving supports and their staff. These consultations have guided DDS in developing a Power Point and training module which is being delivered to DDS and provider staff and prompting essential conversations as we proceed through the pandemic. The burden on DSPs is only becoming more significant as we navigate these waters, further demonstrating the importance of full funding for the DSP Wage Rage Act.

This pandemic has laid bare the marginalization of people with disabilities, and because the current I/DD waiver is limited to people falling below a particular IQ score, many with other developmental disabilities in DC are invisible to the system. Now is therefore the time to revise eligibility requirements to be more equitable in reaching those with the most compelling need. Thank you, councilmember Nadeau, for agreeing to chair the working group that is looking at how to move forward with revised eligibility requirements for the I/DD waiver, and for hosting the first meeting on October 8.

On behalf of the Developmental Disabilities Council, I thank the committee members for your attention and look forward to taking any questions you may have.