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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

DRAFT

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
September 14, 2009

Present: Dana Canevari, Chris Getlein, David Hicks, Elaine Quinn, Matthew Ranelli, Linda Reeder, Heiwa Salovitz, Robin Tousey-Ayers

Absent: Stan Kontogiannis

Staff: Michelle Duprey

Member of the Public: Jason Gomez

Guest: Deborah Chernoff

Deborah Chernoff is the Communication Director of for Health Care Workers in Connecticut. Their group is interested in expanding the homecare workforce. She came to talk about an initiative and wants input from various stakeholders. She represents the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, which is part of the SEIU for (Service Employees International Union).

She began her presentation describing her own personal experience with hospice care of her grandmother who needed 24-hour care during end of life. Her family was not able to find the kind of home care she needed.

From a point of public policy, the Union is created to have a registry, improve wage and benefits for Personal Care Attendants (PCA's) and professionalize the career. The issue is timely for several reasons, according to Chernoff. She said that when two out of three of the large state-run institutions in Connecticut closed, money was no longer available in the community for supporting healthcare but rather it went back into the state's General Fund. With the aging population on the rise, it is also of significant concern that no one knows how many PCA's the state has, or how many will be needed in the future, and no system to track these workers. She stated there are also training issues, such as proper lifting and transferring of patients. The current system does not provide training to PCA's who may need it. It is also difficult to get emergency back-up should a worker become ill and not be able to work. As well, there are no benefits, e.g. sick time or health insurance.

SEIU has created quality homecare councils in other states. They provided voluntary training for PCA's and employers. They have created a central clearinghouse and advocate for consumers and the PCA's on issues that create obstacles for the workforce. They are interested in creating a similar council for people on the Medicaid waiver in Connecticut. She said the councils exist in some other states, including Massachusetts, and they have brought about better working conditions. The organization is reaching out to stakeholders in Connecticut at this time.

Robin Tousey-Ayers made an inquiry about existing registries. Deborah Chernoff replied that from people they talked to who use the two current registries, their experience was "they never got a call."

She went on to say the proposed homecare council board would be made up of consumers who would be the dominant voice. Consumers would be the “employer of PCA’s.”

Jason Gomez asked about the model and how Massachusetts has taken on this policy. Massachusetts is different because the program is administered by the state. The model in Connecticut would be similar to what’s being done in Oregon. The idea would be to expand the funding so that programs such as “Money Follows the Person” would have sufficient workforce.

Robin Tousey-Ayers asked about how far along they were able to get in the Legislative process and the answer was they are looking to redevelop and fine tune the legislation with support from the advocacy groups. They are presenting today, and have done so elsewhere in the hopes of gaining support for the next Legislative session. The Hartford Commission on Disability Issues, for example, has agreed to support these efforts.

Jason Gomez asked about contracts for the individual consumer. It was clarified that the contract is between the council and the union and that the relationship to the Consumer is spelled out in the Contract. Handouts were distributed to the Commissioners. There were a few more questions and it was agreed that the Commission would discuss this issue more at the next meeting and get back to Ms. Chernoff regarding support for this issue.

Ms. Chernoff passed out some materials to the group. Matthew Ranelli asked why there needed to be legislation regarding this issue, e.g. why not just set up a private agency to handle a registry? She explained that under the Medicaid waiver program, PCA’s are treated as independent contractors. As such they have no way to negotiate their wages, as the state sets the wage. Although the wage may vary somewhat, depending on their responsibilities, individuals cannot negotiate with the state. Linda Reeder then asked, again, but why is legislation needed? Why not form a nonprofit or take another route? Ms. Chernoff replied that right now Allied Services is used as a payroll service, but the independent contractors have no ability to collectively bargain. She said that it could be done through a non-profit, but it could not be done on a waiver.

Dana Canevari asked if Ms. Chernoff thought that there would be a change in perception of the use of PCA’s if they were unionized. Ms. Chernoff thought perhaps that may also be a side benefit. She offered to answer any additional questions in the future should they arise.

Minutes

David Hicks made a correction regarding the Minutes for August. Heiwa Salovitz moved to accept the minutes as amended which was seconded by Dana Canevari. Chris Getlein, Matthew Rannelli and Elaine Quinn abstained from voting. The motion was unanimously approved.

Chairman’s Report

David Hicks got an e-mail from Rosemary Hice, the legislative aide to Robert Megna. She informed him about the PA 09-187 law. This law requires the DMV to implement many of the procedures that were contained within the Bill that was not passed regarding Handicapped Parking placards, due to the accompanying fiscal note. The Public Act does not specify deadlines for many of the objectives. David Hicks gave a short description of the new law. It does include a due date for the Commissioner of DMV to respond to the Department of Transportation on the issue of enforcement. After some review of the law, David expressed his intention to write a letter to Commissioner Ward for the purpose of giving input to these procedures which are to be developed by January of 2010. Matthew Ranelli agreed that the legislature is now not likely to provide much more help and that a letter would be best written to the Commissioner of DMV before his required response to Transportation. It was agreed that David Hicks would draft a letter and bring it before the next Commission meeting.

David Hicks reported that Mike Piscitelli, Director of Traffic and Parking, City of New Haven, has replied to the invitation of the Commission to attend a meeting. He will be joining the meeting in November.

Department Report

Michelle Duprey spoke about the presentation by the guest speaker and remembered that there had been opposition to the bill in the disability community. This opposition had been sufficient for Michelle not to support the bill, and she suggested the Commission would benefit by having someone on the opposite side of the issue to present a different view to the Commission. She offered some names of people who might be willing to do this and that she would make a contact to this end on behalf of the Commission.

She went on to report that she has been working hard on the Connect-Ability grant implementation. There will be two training sessions at the Greek Olive. One is on September 23rd and the other is in November.

Michelle Duprey is now serving on the Yale New Haven Patient Family Advisory Council. If anyone has issues related to disability and Yale New Haven Hospital, they may contact her.

Old Business

Website Update-Stan Kontogiannis is absent. No report.

Process for new Commission applicants: This process is still a working draft.

Film Series

Dana Canevari had a phone conversation with Deb Fairchild from the SCSU Disability Resource Department regarding a film series. As it turned out SCSU does not do a film series and the facility would need to be rented. It was decided after much discussion the place to start on this initiative would be to develop a project proposal detailing what the Commission would like to do with a film series so they could present it to SCSU or other universities in the surrounding community.

New Business

No new business

Other business

No other business

Public Comment

David Hicks said the he was in touch with The Hartford Commission on Disability Issues, specifically the Chairperson, Janet Wallens. The Hartford Commission is hosting an event on October 21, at 5:30 pm at Hartford City Hall in observance of Disability Awareness Month. He said they also discussed the handicapped parking issue and he may ask for their support.

Linda Reeder has written a book and it will be on sale in March. The book is a guide to rating green buildings. Congratulations!

Jason Gomez presented David Hicks with a Resource Directory and shared his plan to walk for ALS at Lighthouse Park.

Dana Canevari made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Chris Getlein. The meeting adjourned.