

FROM: Commissioner Monica White, Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

TO: Senator Virginia Lyons, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Representative Ann Pugh, Chair, House Committee on Human Services

DATE: July 7, 2021

RE: State System of Care Plan Extension Request & Response to Letter RE: H.243 of the 2021-22 Legislative Session

Request to Extend the Vermont State System of Care Plan for Developmental Disabilities Services

The Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living, Developmental Disabilities Services Division, is respectfully requesting a one-year extension of its current State System of Care Plan (SOCP) for Developmental Disabilities Services pursuant to the requirements of the Developmental Disabilities Act of 1996 (DD Act), as amended in 2014 (Act 140).

The current SOCP was approved from FY2018 through FY2020, and was previously granted an extension until July 2021, and describes the nature, extent, allocation and timing of services that will be provided to people with developmental disabilities and their families. Looking to the future the Division is requesting an additional one-year extension due to the following circumstances:

1. The Division is continuing its comprehensive Delivery System and Payment Reform project that intends to overhaul the delivery and payment of developmental disabilities services in the State of Vermont. The depth and extent of this reform initiative is such that the Division does not believe it to be prudent to revise the SOCP, absent the final design and significant stakeholder input necessary to implement these changes.
2. The COVID-19 State of Emergency has continued to disrupt normal State operations. Given the continuation of additional work in response to COVID-19 by both the Division and the community service providers, the Division has not been able to initiate the significant planning and engagement necessary to update the SOCP.
3. The Division received the recommendation of the Developmental Disabilities Services State Program Standing Committee (SPSC) to move forward with this extension request during its monthly meeting on April 15, 2021. The SPSC encouraged the Division to focus on making the new SOCP clearer by using more accessible language, include new opportunities that may be possible with federal funding under COVID, focus on expanding flexibility and choice, and consider a new format that separates the procedural sections for providers from more general information.

In consideration of these substantial obstacles, the one-year extension will allow the Division to continue the planning and engagement activities for the new SOCP with the expectation of having the next three-year SOCP ready to implement on July 1, 2022.

Response to Letter regarding H.243 of the 2021-22 Legislative Session

The Department is in receipt of a Letter from House Human Services Chair Pugh on May 18th, 2021, which directs the Department to convene a working group to carry forward the work discussed in draft bill H.243, which did not make it through the legislative process in the first part of this biennium. The letter and the draft bill consider a variety of topics through the specific lens of the needs of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A brief summary of topics addressed in the letter includes: identification of gaps in services; supports to families; a review of other State approaches; recommendations for training; potential modifications for employment supports and post-secondary education programs; expanded housing and residential support options; financial support for families; and, identification of additional staffing needs at DAIL.

Consistent with testimony provided by DAIL and other constituents on H.243, the Department considers that the 3-year process to update Vermont's State System of Care Plan is well set up to engage with Developmental Disabilities stakeholders on the items of interest listed in the draft bill and in the letter received on May 18th. Although not narrowed to the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis, the stakeholder engagement process will be inclusive of individuals with ASD and their families through the following opportunities:

- The State Program Standing Committee for Developmental Disabilities Services is provided updates and opportunities for regular input on content and process during the Committee's monthly meetings. Six of the ten constituencies listed in the 5/18/2021 letter are represented in the Developmental Disabilities State Program Standing Committee.
- Self-advocacy and advocacy organizations (i.e., Green Mountain Self Advocates, Vermont Family Network, Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council) are offered opportunities to meet in person to provide input on content and process.
- A survey requesting input to the State System of Care Plan is sent out via Survey Monkey to all stakeholder groups and the broader developmental disabilities community, including posting the survey on the DAIL website.
- Each Designated Agency must develop and submit a Local System of Care Plan for their catchment area. The development process of Local System of Care Plans includes agencies seeking input about services and gaps in services from their constituency; including people in services, their family members, advocacy groups, community members and other stakeholders from their catchment area.
- Regional and on-line public forums are conducted by the Developmental Disabilities Services Division to get input on the draft State System of Care Plan.
- Written public comments may be submitted throughout the planning and development of the draft State System of Care Plan.

In light of this robust process and the support that it requires, the Department respectfully submits that it will continue with this plan for updates to the State's State System of Care Plan.

Although a report is not planned for submission in December, the Department will be pleased to speak with the Legislature next session regarding the progress it has made on the State System of Care Plan and what engagement opportunities have been provided to individuals with ASD and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Monica White". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Monica White

Commissioner, Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living