

The first meeting of the Disability Commission for the 2008 interim was held on August 14, at the General Assembly Building in Richmond. Following the election of Senator Linda T. Puller as Chair and Delegate Bobby Orrock as Vice Chair, introduction of the members of the Commission, and opening remarks, the work of the Commission commenced.

Virginia Wounded Warrior Program

The meeting began with an overview of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. Mr. Vincent M. Burgess, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services began with an introduction of the Department of Veterans Affairs, stating that the Department has provided benefit services to 708,000 veterans, and processed 21,000 claims on behalf of veterans. Currently, 100,000 veterans actively receive benefits from the Department through 21 offices and two care centers around the Commonwealth.

Ms. Martha Mead, Executive Order 19 Project Manager, then presented information on the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. Ms. Mead stated that the program received funding on July 1 of this year. In preparation for that event, the Department has been working to build networks and increase public awareness of the program. Additionally, the Department has been working on developing a process for the distribution of community resources, and working with providers to iron out any problems with service delivery. Significant near-term actions include staffing of the program, beginning with selection of Captain Katherine A. Wilson as Director, hiring of five support staff for the Director, and selecting three regional directors. By November, Ms. Mead stated, a more developed training curriculum for interested stakeholders would be available. Moving forward, program staff will coordinate with providers, community resources, the educational and criminal justice systems, and the National Guard reintegration program.

Olmstead Work Group/Money Follows the Person

Ms. Julie Stanley, Director of Community Integration for People with Disabilities, then presented information on the work of the Olmstead Work Group, Money Follows the Person Grant Work Group, and Money Follows the Person Housing and Transportation Initiative. Ms. Stanley noted that the Money Follows the Person Grant Work Group and the Money Follows the Person Housing and Transportation Initiative have been developed to fill gaps in the Medicaid program, to allow people to move out of institutions and into the community, and to help persons who are in the community remain in the community. These groups, which involve representatives of a variety of agencies serving persons with disabilities, have worked to set goals and develop strategies to accomplish these goals and move over 1,000 people from nursing facilities, ICFMRs, and long-stay hospitals. Ms. Stanley noted that each person transitioning receives a one-time award of up to \$5,000 to support transition. These persons continue to receive services through Medicaid Waiver programs to support their independent living goals. One problem that the Work Groups have identified is a lack of housing available for persons transitioning; the Money Follows the Person Housing and Transportation Initiative has been working on recommendations to address this issue. Ms. Stanley concluded by stating that the Work Group and Housing and Transportation Initiative reports should be available by the next meeting.

Disability Commission Housing Work Group

Mr. Ed Turner, Governor's Special Advisor on Disability Issues, and Ms. Teri Barker Morgan, with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, then gave an overview of the actions of the Disability Commission Housing Work Group. Their presentation began with a review of the history of housing issues, including funding and programmatic issues. They then provided updates on the Housing Work Group efforts, including a plan to review recommendations developed by various other groups focused on disability issues, and identify several key recommendations to be pursued by the Disability Commission. These recommendations will be presented at the next meeting.

Medicaid Buy In Program

Mr. Jack Quigley, Department of Medical Assistance Services, then introduced the topic of the Medicaid Buy In, stating that the program was first authorized by Congress in 1997, and by the General Assembly in 2006. The program allows persons who are disabled to earn more than the income asset eligibility requirement while maintaining eligibility for services, so that persons may work while receiving benefits. The program was implemented on January 1, 2007. Current utilization of the program is limited (15 enrollees) due to the low income levels authorized and the fact that many people who could participate in the program already have some work incentives available through other SSI programs.

Dr. Joe Ashley, Co-Director of the grant program at the Department of Rehabilitative Services, added that the Department is seeking ways to create a more robust program, in order to provide additional opportunities for persons with disabilities. One recommendation would be to increase eligibility from its current level of 80% of the federal poverty level to 100% of the federal poverty level, allowing 19,000 additional persons to become eligible for participation. Not all of these persons would utilize the program, however, Dr. Ashley pointed out. Estimates indicate that approximately 200 people per year would take advantage of the program if the eligibility requirements were changed. The cost of funding these additional slots would be approximately \$1.5 to \$1.8 million per year.

Discussion of Study Plan

Following the presentations, Commission members discussed further subjects for study for future meetings, including additional information on the Brain Injury Waiver program, recycling of durable medical equipment, the implications of the Department of Rehabilitative Services' order of selection, and emergency preparedness for individuals with disabilities and communities as a whole.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Disability Commission will be held in Richmond, date and time to be announced.