

DISABLED PERSONS PROTECTION COMMISSION

Commissioners' Meeting Minutes May 18, 2020

Commissioners Present: Honorable James Brett, Mary Beth McMahon, Kacy Maitland

DPPC Staff Present: Nancy Alterio, Julie Westwater, John Brown, Ann Murray, Kathy Barthe

Minutes Recorded By: Kathy Barthe

Handouts – The following materials were distributed to the Commissioners:

- Commissioners' Agenda of May 18, 2020
- Commissioners' Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2020
- Budget Report April 2020
- Budget Narrative April 2020
- Hotline Activity Report April
- Oversight Activity Report April

The Honorable Chairperson Brett called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes of Meeting of March 10, 2020

MOTION: To accept the minutes of March 10, 2020 as received motioned by the Honorable James T. Brett, seconded by Commissioner Mary Beth McMahon.

VOTE: Unanimous to accept the minutes of March 10, 2020 as received.

2. Operations and COVID-19

At the onset of the Governor Baker's work from home mandate, the DPPC Leadership team established procedures and implemented a plan for staff to work remotely. DPPC's IT Team, led by Jean Frejuste, did an outstanding job providing the technological capability, tools, training and equipment needed for staff to work remotely. Many staff agreed to use their personal devices as DPPC just didn't have enough to support them. To address this and as funding allowed, IT Director immediately ordered laptops and docking stations to equip the majority of the staff in need.

- **Intake:** The Intake Unit continues to process cases remotely. DPPC has witnessed an increase in informational calls due to clients seeking resources, a decrease in abuse reports due to social isolation, and a doubling of death reports due to COVID-19 related issues.
- **Investigations:** DPPC issued additional guidance to DPPC, DDS, DMH and MRC regarding conducting investigations and interviewing victims, abusers and witnesses. DPPC's goal is to ensure that the organization remains operational to the best of its ability during this pandemic. As an independent public service agency, DPPC must

maintain certain critical functions to protect persons with disabilities from abuse while maintaining the health and safety of staff and others.

- **Oversight:** Although most of the Oversight functions were digitized, there were still several key paper processes in place when the work from home order came into affect. In response to working remotely, the Oversight Unit has worked to eliminate the paper processes and improving efficiency. In addition, with the decrease in abuse reports, there has been a decrease in investigations. Investigators are taking advantage of this lull to catch up on overdue cases. Given this, the Officer Officers have seen a significant increase in drafted investigation reports to review and have worked hard to get them reviewed and finalized.
- **SARU:** The SARU Unit continues to work to ensure alleged victims receive access to trauma services. They have also been assisting DPPC staff with self-care services including hosting weekly Zoom lunches, “Buddy-Up” with a co-worker and notifying staff of relevant webinars. The Peer Support Team has also been busy. Patti Quatieri and Leigh Ann Barry continue their outreach efforts with video calls, journals and positive messaging.
- **Re-Entry Plan:** DPPC is adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines regarding training, signage, symptoms, cleaning and supplies, protective equipment and 25% capacity. DPPC will begin staff re-entry with a split re-entry schedule beginning June 7. Staff members, have been divided into two teams (DPPC and CPPD) and will rotate every two weeks with an option of working in the office during their assigned weeks if there is a need. Staff can continue to work remotely – no one is being forced into the office.

3. **Audit Review – July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2019**

The Office of the State Auditor is continuing their DPPC performance audit review of July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2019. DPPC has recently been assigned a new audit team, a third team. Ann Murray continues to oversee the needs of the Audit Team.

4. **Administration and Finance**

- **Monthly Budget Summary April 2020:** The Monthly Budget Summary Report for April 2020, along with a narrative, was submitted to the Commissioners for their review and comments. DPPC has spent 83% of the appropriated budget to date and does not anticipate any deficiencies. Although DPPC has experienced a decrease in travel expenses, expenses in other areas has increased such as IT purchases, Calls Plus and the Support Group.
- **DPPC Maintenance, Expansion, Registry Requests:** John Brown, Director Administration and Finance, reported that with the Legislature focusing on COVID-19 related legislation, there has been no update on the FY21 budget. Due to the budget process delay, as of July 1, DPPC will function on a 1/12 Budget based on the Governor’s recommendation. DPPC continues to work and communicate with the budget analysts to relay the Agency’s budget needs and concerns regarding additional funding to address the increased number of investigations, backlog and implementation of the abuse registry. As required, DPPC previously submitted a

FY2021 Expansion Plan Narrative request to ANF and the legislature detailing the agency's budget projections to address needs. The Plan asked for the funding needed to implement the Registry. DPPC is concerned that it will not receive the necessary funding to implement the Registry. COVID-19 expenditures are being tracked for a grant request refund from MEMA for FEMA for a possible 75% reimbursement. As it stands now, any refunds are going to the General Fund and not to DPPC.

- **Ways and Means Budget Hearing – Testimony:** Executive Director Alterio was scheduled to testify on DPPC's budget needs on March 16th to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. The Hearing was cancelled due to COVID-19. The Executive Director offered to provide written testimony but the analysts asked DPPC to hold off.

5. Legislation

- **Abuse Registry:** Nicky's Law has passed and the bill has been signed by the Governor, effective January 31, 2021. As a result of the bill's passage, DPPC will establish and maintain a registry of care providers against whom DPPC has made a "substantiated finding of registrable abuse" by those that abuse victims with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Although the Legislature is currently focused on COVID-19 related issues, DPPC will need to obtain the necessary funding to implement the new charge. A great deal of work needs to take place to get the registry up and running from drafting regulations, recruiting, hiring and training new staff, developing a database, educating providers, training DDS and so much more.
- **Amending DPPC's Statute – H.4321 and S.2577:** House Bill 4231 and Senate Bill 2577 are Acts updating terminology and investigative practices related to the protection of persons with disabilities. This legislation serves to strengthen and modify various aspects of DPPC's operations by amending the enabling statute. These amendments are necessary for the DPPC to implement Nicky's Law. DPPC's bill has passed the Senate Ways and Means and now is in House Ways and Means. The Bill is not moving as everyone's attention is on legislation related to COVID-19.

6. Organizational Updates

- **Telephone System – Implementation Completed:** RingCentral (RC), DPPC's new system is live; staff training has been completed, and is successfully being used as a flexible interface platform—calls, messaging, and video teleconferencing.
- **Database Rebuild and Related Projects:** The Database rebuild is a massive undertaking. Database improvements include the ability to feed information into the National Adult Maltreatment Reporting System (NAMRS), centralization of case management and introduction of web-based forms resulting in increased efficiency and effectiveness of DPPC's operations agency-wide. Introductory statewide training is being held on Thursday, June 4 during the APS In-Service training. The Database is schedule to launch July 1, 2020.
- **APS Statewide In-Service:** A one-day in-service training for all APS staff to introduce the new database, new report forms, and policy changes associated with the database rebuild, is scheduled remotely for June 4, 2020. It will be held in split

sessions: DDS and DPPC staffs in the morning and MRC and DMH staffs in the afternoon.

7. New Business

No new business.

8. Adjournment

MOTION: Honorable James T. Brett motioned to adjourn the meeting at 4:10 p.m.,
Commissioner Maitland seconded

VOTE: Unanimous to adjourn the meeting at 4:10 p.m.