

DHH Submits Ideas to the Streamlining Commission *Will Looming Crisis be a Catalyst for Change?*

The newspaper headlines remind their readers almost daily of Louisiana's severe budget crisis – especially in the Medicaid program. This was not unexpected. We began to feel the effects in the 2009 Legislative Session and the fiscal gurus said it was only going to get worse. In passing Act 491, the 2009 Legislature was clear:

The state of Louisiana faces a severe decline in revenues through fiscal year 2012 which, if no corrective action is taken, will leave a significant funding gap in the state government expenditures and will create serious sustainability issues in financing of state obligations. It is essential that the state act now to reduce the cost of state government, through all means available, including efficiencies, economies, greater effectiveness, and other means to streamline government in order to overcome the projected severe revenue reductions occurring through 2012 and to ensure that available state tax dollars are being spent efficiently and effectively. Many state agencies were created over 30 years ago and a review of all agencies and its activities, functions, programs, and services is needed to determine whether the purpose served by the agency or activity, function, program, or service continues to be relevant. (Act 491 of the 2009 La. Legislature)

The Streamlining Commission, charged with the task stated above, will submit initial recommendations to the Governor, Commissioner of Administration and Legislature by December 15, 2009. The commission is chaired by Senator Jack Donahue and includes three additional legislators, the Commissioner of Administration, the State Treasurer, and four representatives of private enterprise.

Each state department was asked to generate ideas that could result in more effective and efficient services for Louisiana's citizens by reducing over reliance on state government. The Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) drew the support of community advocates for people with developmental disabilities by including the consolidation of its public developmental centers in its report. DHH's recommendations indicated that the "financing system should emphasize self-determination and independence" and allocate services for people with developmental disabilities according to need. It is refreshing for DHH to acknowledge what community advocates have long been promoting - that reducing the state's reliance on institutions is in line with national best practice and would give Louisiana the ability to serve more people in their communities within current allocation of resources. However, consideration of privatization of the developmental centers was also included and will be met with strong resistance from several different constituency groups.

For individuals who are aging or have adult on-set disabilities DHH suggested implementing pilot programs in selected areas of the state to demonstrate the success of long-term care services that are integrated and coordinated. The report referenced

successful, cost-effective systems in other states that provide a full spectrum of services using individualized needs based assessments. DHH indicated that privatization of state-owned and operated residential facilities for this population should be considered as well.

Two slightly different suggestions were submitted to the Commission by DHH and the Department of Social Services (DSS), but both would transfer services currently provided by Louisiana Rehabilitation Services out of DSS and split them among other agencies. A plan to consolidate the operations of both the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs and the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs with offices in DHH was also proposed by DHH to eliminate administrative duplication and promote ease of access for citizens seeking assistance. There were also several suggestions proposed by DHH that would affect the mental health population. You can read the DHH report in its entirety and those from any other state agency at http://doa.louisiana.gov/doa/cabinet_reports.htm

If there ever was a time for a "commission," legislature and administration to take bold steps and truly reform the state's system of supports and services for people with disabilities, this is it. If a \$1 billion projected deficit isn't the catalyst to close the state's expensive, outdated, ineffective institutions, there will never be one! Read more about the Streamlining Commission at <http://senate.legis.state.la.us/streamline/default.asp>