

2010 Public Policy Guideline

Snohomish County Developmental Disabilities

Citizen Advisory Board

The 2010 Public Policy Guideline for Snohomish County Developmental Disabilities details key issues of concern identified by the Citizen Advisory Board in conjunction with the community at large. This Guideline is to serve as a tool for the County's elected officials and others who work in the public policy arena on issues critical to the County's citizens with developmental disabilities and their families. For more information contact Stuart Torgerson 425-388-7208.

For the 2010 Supplemental Budget Session of the Washington State Legislature

The Board is wholly cognizant of the current state budget crisis and scarcity of public funding. Concurrently the Board is concerned with the possibility of any further erosion of community services for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families who are the designated primary caregivers. With Washington state ranked 39th in the nation in public "fiscal effort" for its citizens with developmental disabilities,⁽¹⁾ coupled with recent service reductions in the legislature's biennium budget, our communities cannot afford any further erosion of the essential infrastructure of the community service system that supports individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. **The Board strongly recommends that the legislature:**

- Make no additional reductions to service levels in community services.
- Restore the option of community supported living providers to fill vacancies in programs with referrals from families in crisis and/or families where the parents' age and ability to support an individual creates health and safety concerns.
- Provide long term supported employment funding for all students transitioning from public schools, regardless of federal waiver status, who have demonstrated a commitment to working and/or have sought employment prior to graduation at age 21.
- Secure any public fund savings realized from downsizing or consolidation of the state Residential Habilitation Centers (RHCs), as a result of the mandated study/report, and use recovered funds to address the unmet needs of individuals and families in the community.

Comprehensive support to families as the primary caregivers In addition to the Supplemental Budget items addressed above, the Board strongly encourages the legislature to act upon its own policy which states that individuals and families are best served when they are supported in their homes and communities. It is time for critical long range review and action in regard to the distribution of our state's scarce resources, based on economic efficiency and investment in our primary service resources – families and our communities. This review needs to address public funding options, in order to end the current growing gap between the "haves" (waiver funded) and "have-nots" (non-waiver funded) in our state. Washington needs an inclusive, affirmative approach to supporting our families, in order to address the continued placement and segregation of children in our Residential Habilitation Centers (RHCs/institutions).

The legislature should establish a formal policy that affirms that individuals should be supported to participate, work and thrive in their home communities. Families, as the primary caregivers, should be supported by adequate services and resources, and benefit from residing in welcoming, inclusive communities. Without a clear policy and comprehensive approach that addresses individual and family needs from birth through adulthood, the legislature will continue to address services as

isolated programs, when in fact these services are all interrelated from the perspective of the individual, the family, and the communities that support them.

The Board urges the legislature to adequately support and invest in families as the long term primary caregivers in our community, through a comprehensive, coordinated array of community services and resources that include:

Family Support Services The legislature has not fully demonstrated sufficient support for families or a grasp of the broad range of families' needs. All families are different, and it is not uncommon that siblings, grandparents, extended family and others may be in the primary caregiver role. Investment in support to all families includes:

- The review and redefinition of the traditional forms of family support, including respite, education/parenting skills, and in-home crisis resource supports, in order to meet the new, broader expectations placed on families. This will assist in avoiding further emergency placements of children in the state's RHCs.
- An increase in creative housing options through access to information, increased resources, affordability, and better coordination, so families and individuals can develop opportunities for increased independent living options.
- Assurance of access to recreation and leisure opportunities in the community's public and private parks/recreation programs, along with other opportunities for individuals to access and participate in meaningful activities in their communities.

Early Intervention Services Early intervention services are critical, in that they can greatly enhance the developmental growth of the child, and thus increase the quality of life of the individual and family. Early intervention services are cost-effective, saving many times over the initial investment in public funding, as primary developmental needs are addressed prior to entering public schools at age three. The Board urges the legislature to embrace the findings of its own 2008 study, designating base rate funding for each eligible child, to ensure the availability of equitable early intervention funding for services across the state.

Employment Services for High School Graduates and other Working Age Adults The legislature must continue to provide adequate funding to ensure that all eligible students and adults who want to work receive the support they need to secure and retain community employment, regardless of whether they are waiver or non-waiver funded, as employment is a critical component of a full, productive life. The Board urges the legislature to support employment as a priority for all adults and incorporate the Working Age Adult Policy into state statute.

Community System Stabilization The legislature should recognize the value of a skilled, stable community service provider network. It is essential that the community service provider workforce is compensated fairly for providing quality services and creating a stable, inclusive community environment. The Board encourages the legislature to establish a vendor rate that justly compensates community services staff, and accounts for the increased expenses in rents, utilities, insurance and other overhead expenses associated with providing community based services.

(1) Footnote: Data from The State of the States in Developmental Disabilities 2008 by David Braddock, University of Colorado. "Fiscal effort" is a measure of state spending for developmental disability services per \$1,000 of aggregate statewide personal income.

Adopted by the Snohomish County Developmental Disability Citizen Advisory Board on October 27, 2009.