

## # 43 Major DHR/DCH Reorganization and Other Information

Dearest Advocates:

Today, Governor Perdue's office announced major reorganization for the Dept. of Human Resources, as well as, the Dept. of Community Health and a newly formed Dept. of Behavioral Health (which will include the mental health and addictive disease programs that are currently included in DHR).

Hopefully, through this process each dept. will be able to streamline the burdensome paperwork, increase the access of care and providers, and increase overall efficiency of taxpayers \$\$\$ which will lead to more services needed for individuals with disabilities to maximize their potential!

Please see below the actual press release by the Governor's office, as well as, the article written by Tom Crawford of Capitol Impact.

**I need your help: A national media reporter has contacted me looking for stories from families that have been negatively impacted by the economic slowdown in the economy and reduction of federal and state programs to support children with disabilities. (Example: Being denied the Katie Beckett Waiver)**

**If you are interested in talking to the media and helping to further educate the nation on the importance of such programs and support, please contact me by Friday, August 29. I will need your full name, child's age/disability, issue you are facing and contact information. (Example: You have taken a second mortgage out on your home to pay for therapy)**

Education is the key to helping those that are not impacted by disabilities understand how important services are for our children. Please get involved and help us "educate" those that don't understand.

In addition, Maria Shriver wrote a great article in the Los Angeles Times Newspaper last week regarding the use of the R-word. Let's continue to educate the community on why the R-word is not appropriate language in society.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-shriver22-2008aug22%2C0%2C4571473.story?track=rss&jmid=12898&j=164102159>

In addition, below is additional media attention on various topics, as well as, free sled hockey, an exciting technology from Georgia Tech, and family forum information for individuals with cerebral palsy.

I hope you find this information helpful.

*United... We Will Make A Difference!*

Sincerely, Heidi

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**Press Release from the Office of the Governor regarding DHR Restructuring:**

Governor Perdue releases reorganization plan for DHR  
Creates stand alone agency for mental health, addictive disease programs

ATLANTA “ Today Governor Sony Perdue released the findings of the Health and Human Services Task Force, which calls for a new Department of Behavioral Health encompassing the mental health and addictive disease programs currently housed in the Department of Human Resources.

Since DHRs creation 35 years ago under Governor Jimmy Carter, our states growth and healthcare needs have changed dramatically, Governor Perdue said. This restructuring of DHR recognizes those changing needs and puts in place a frame work for a more efficient, effective delivery of these critical services.

In addition to a new department focused solely on behavioral health, the proposed reorganization plan calls for merging the Department of Community Health with the public health and health regulation programs of DHR to make up a reconstituted Department of Health. Current DCH Commissioner Dr. Rhonda Medows would lead the new Department of Health.

The remaining social services under DHR would become the Department of Human Services. Programs included in this department would include Developmental Disabilities, Aging, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Support. Current DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker will lead the new Department of Human Services.

The proposal calls for legislation to be introduced when the General Assembly convenes next January with the transition to the new agencies occurring on July 1, 2009.

It has been exciting serving with my fellow legislators and governors staff as we look to transform the delivery of health and human services in Georgia, said Senator Renee Unterman. This has been a lot of work and there still is a lot of work to do. This is a step in the right direction and I look forward to working closely with the agencies, legislature and advocacy communities on these important changes.

In addition to Sen.Unterman, three other legislators serviced on the task force: Sen. Jack Hill, Rep. Ben Harbin and Rep. Mark Butler.

This is a positive step on the road to correcting our mental and public health systems, Rep. Butler said. It is a huge step for this administration to pull these fragile lives out of this larger mix to get them the help and attention they need.

**Tom Crawford of Capitol Impact- DHR Restructuring is Proposed:**

DHR restructuring is proposed  
by Tom Crawford on 8/26/2008

Gov. Sonny Perdue released the details Tuesday of a legislative report that recommends a drastic restructuring of the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the Department of Community Health (DCH), two of the largest agencies in state government.

Perdue will have legislation introduced in the next General Assembly session that splits up and recombines some of the administrative functions of DHR and DCH and creates a new state agency as well.

The new Department of Behavioral Health will administer the mental health and addictive disease programs that are currently DHRs responsibility.

The Department of Community Health will absorb the public health and health regulation programs of DHR and become the renamed Department of Health headed by the current DCH commissioner, Dr. Rhonda Medows.

The remaining social service programs will continued to be handled by DHR, which will be renamed the Department of Human Services. These programs include developmental disabilities, aging, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and child support. DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker will be in charge of the renamed agency.

The plan for restructuring the health agencies is the product of several months work by a legislative task force that included Rep. Mark Butler (R-Carrollton), Sen. Jack Hill (R-Reidsville), Rep. Ben Harbin (R-Evans) and Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford).

Their work was prompted by a series of problems in DHRs management that have been spotlighted by the media and the federal courts.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution has run numerous articles over the past two years detailing the suspicious deaths of dozens of patients in state-operated mental hospitals.

Only last week, U.S. District Court Judge Marvin Shoob said there was clear and convincing evidence that Perdue and other state officials were not complying with a court settlement that required them to find permanent homes for more children in foster care. Shoob gave the state 20 days to show why it should not be held in contempt of court.

Many legislators have also been critical of Walkers management of DHR and the many programs for which it is responsible.

Our states growth and healthcare needs have changed dramatically Perdue said. This restructuring of DHR recognizes those changing needs and puts in place a framework for a more efficient, effective delivery of these critical services.

This is a really good first step, said Butler, a member of the legislative task force. I think were on the right track . . . this is just the beginning. Theres a lot more work thats going to have to be done in the coming years.

Butler said mental health care was one area where the state can make some of the biggest operational improvements by coordinating the various programs scattered about the bureaucracy.

The restructuring proposal will break up a state agency that was first created 35 years ago by then-governor Jimmy Carter as part of a massive reorganization of state government (Carter named Richard Harden as the first commissioner of DHR).

DHR has frequently been the center of controversy over the years and the perception has been that the agency is impossible for any one person to administer efficiently because it is responsible for delivering so many different kinds of healthcare and social services.

Nobody is smart enough to run the current DHR, Butler noted.

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**Mark Your Calendars: AACPDM & RFTS Co-Sponsor Family Forum Workshop  
Friday, September 19th, 1-4pm, Hyatt Regency Atlanta**

This is an exciting opportunity to hear and interact with some of the world's leading physicians, scientists and researchers who specialize in cerebral palsy at the American Academy of Cerebral Palsy & Developmental Medicine (AACPDM) & "Reaching For The Stars" co-sponsored Family Forum on Friday, September 19th at the Hyatt Regency Atlanta from 1-4pm. The Family Forum Workshop is absolutely FREE with registration from the RFTS website -- [click here](#). This will be a wonderful event you won't want to miss if you are interested in the newest cerebral palsy information. Please [click here](#) to see the entire agenda.

An outstanding group of speakers will include: [Dr. Hank Chambers](#), orthopedic surgeon (San Diego); [Dr. Janice Brunstrom](#), neurologist (St. Louis); [Dr. Leland Albright](#), neurosurgeon (Wisconsin); [Dr. H. Herr Graham](#), orthopedic surgeon (Australia); [Dr. Martin Gough](#), orthopedic surgeon (UK); Dr. [Michael Johnston](#), neurologist, Johns Hopkins; and [Dr. Joanne Kurtzberg](#), Duke (cord blood stem cell transplants).

Miss Iowa USA, Abbey Curran, will also speak about growing up with CP, as well as RFTS leadership sharing new and important information with families. Please email us at [info@reachingforthestars.org](mailto:info@reachingforthestars.org) if you need more information. Hope to see you there!!!

We also want to bring you an exciting opportunity regarding adults with Cerebral Palsy brought to you by the Cerebral Palsy International Research Foundation (formerly the United Cerebral Palsy Research & Education Foundation), the AACPD and RFTS, Inc.

This exciting two-day workshop is called: **Adults with Cerebral Palsy: A Workshop to Define the Challenges of Treating and Preventing the Secondary Musculoskeletal and Neuromuscular Complications in this Rapidly Growing Population.** Held September 16 & 17, 2008 ~ Hyatt Regency Downtown Atlanta, GA

The workshop will bring together leading scientists, physicians, healthcare professionals, families and individuals living with cerebral palsy to review current knowledge and develop a blueprint for future research and collaboration in the area of aging and rehabilitation in cerebral palsy. The workshop will begin at 7:45 AM and adjourn for the day at 7:00 PM on Tuesday, September 16th. We will conclude with a one hour session, Wednesday morning, the 17th at 7:30 AM. Please [click here](#) for the registration form and for more information.

RFTS is pleased to be able to help bring you these outstanding workshops and forums while the AACPD annual conference is in Atlanta. We hope you will be able take advantage of these two opportunities and meet us there!

Sincerely,

Cynthia Frisina Gray and Anna Marie Champion  
Co-Founders, RFTS, Inc.

**New Exciting Information Regarding: Tongue Drive System (TDS) from Georgia Tech:**

The Tongue Drive System (TDS) can potentially enable individuals with severe disabilities control their environment through their tongue motion.

There is a short description of the system on Georgia Tech website:

<http://www.gatech.edu/newsroom/release.html?id=1960&ga=5>

Using TDS requires a certain level of control over the tongue motion as well as attachment of a magnetic tracer on the tongue in the form of implantation or tongue piercing. The tracer is very small like a grain of rice.

**FREE - SLED HOCKEY Opportunity:**

We are looking for kids from the ages of 6-15 and the program is free no fees required.

The first clinic will be in Sept or the first week of October. We are waiting to get confirmation on ice time.

If anyone is interested in trying out sled hockey have them contact our office and we will get them on the roster and send them out an information packet. Our office number is 770-873-7572

*Katherine Conn  
Executive Director  
One Childhood, Inc.*

**NBC Augusta – Richmond County Commissioner Needs Help with understanding the rights of individuals with disabilities:**

<http://www.nbcaugusta.com/news/local/27160364.html>

**NBC Atlanta: Kids and Heart Disease:**

<http://www.11alive.com/news/health/default.aspx>

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