

69 President Obama Disability Agenda, Unlock, Educational training and more!

Dearest Advocates:

Below is some great information that I thought you might find a benefit to you including IEP educational training opportunity, an art work request for Mental Health day at the Capitol, Unlock the Waiting Lists update, great information on the legislative process from an AJC newspaper article, and President Obama's disability agenda link.

The DHR's - Office of Developmental Disabilities will be having three additional family training sessions in Augusta, Savannah and Rome. This is for families that have the NOW/COMP Disability Waivers. This does not include Katie Beckett/Deeming Waiver families unless you are interesting in finding out more regarding these new disability waivers. I have also posted the flyers on my website under "Events" for further information.

Have a great day,

"UNITED – WE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"

Sincerely,

Heidi

(Proud Mother to Jacob - 9 yrs old with Down syndrome and Jared - 7 yrs old)

"Help the Children Now, So They Can Help Themselves Later!"

www.heidijmoore.com

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President Obama's Disability Agenda:

President Obama's administration updated the Whitehouse web site as he was being sworn in. The site looks great and it took about five seconds to find his stand on disabilities:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/disabilities/>

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IEP Training Opportunity- January 29, 2009:

Tools of the Trade for the IEP Process – Basic Rights, Entitlements and Tasks to Manage All IEP Team Meetings with Jon Zimring

This presentation addresses parental rights in the IEP process; its regulation and rulings which may positively impact the position of parents, advocates and attorneys. Rights in the planning and preparation for IEP meeting, obtaining documents, IEP participation, content requirements and discussion mandates, use of the meetings to review and provide timely comprehensive evaluations and IEEs, the role of parental consent, and post-IEP activities to amend, correct, or enforce IEP documents and IEP Team meeting commitments will be addressed in a practical

approach. These rights will be identified with specific support for accomplishing many of the common issues which arise for the goal of full parental participation. Materials and discussion are intended to be a checklist for IEP management of the IEP meeting process. Please RSVP to Michelle at 770-451-0570 or mwheller@autismspeaks.org

January 29th 7-9pm - Northside United Methodist Church - www.northsideumc.org

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Training Announcement: Georgia's "New" DD Waivers - Informational sessions for Families & Others - three locations

Waiver participants, families, representatives, support networks, and advocacy groups are invited to attend an informational session about Georgia's "New" DD Waivers.

Three sessions: (Look for the flyer that best suit your location on additional emails)

1. Rome on the evening of Tuesday, February 10, 2009
2. Augusta on the evening of Tuesday, March 17, 2009
3. Savannah on the evening of Tuesday, March 24, 2009.

Please help us to reach families throughout Georgia by distributing the attached announcements regarding these sessions. The announcements will also be posted on the Division of MHDDAD training website at <http://mhddad.dhr.georgia.gov/training> to print and downloaded.

Registration online is quick and easy at www.cviog.uga.edu/training/dhr. Information about how to request special accommodations are included in the announcements. Questions can be emailed to: RegistrationMHDDAD@dhr.state.ga.us (**Refreshments will be provided - we encourage registration**)

Note to Regional Offices: Please forward to DD providers and ask them to share with families of consumers they serve. Also, please forward to Support Coordination agencies and Regional Office Staff. Regional Planning Board members are also invited to attend.

Note to Support Coordination Agencies: Please forward to families you serve.

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Art Display for Mental Health Day at the Capital

The Mental Health Services Coalition is seeking artwork by consumers for display during Mental Health Day at the Capital (Tuesday, February 17, 2009). Artwork will be on display throughout the event and will be returned to the artists afterward. We welcome artists to be in the art display area during breaks in the day's schedule to discuss their work with interested parties, if desired.

Please contact Beth Boersma by e-mail (at bboersma@comfriend.com) or phone (at 404-875-0381, ext. 252) with questions or to arrange for participation in this art display. Janet Reasons will be assisting with coordination of this display and can also be reached at 404-875-0381.

Thank you for your support of the 2009 Mental Health Day at the Capital.

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From AJC Newspaper:

Nuts and bolts of the legislative session

Wednesday, January 07, 2009

How to contact your legislators:

In person: Look for legislators in the House or Senate chamber or in their offices. Volunteer pages (usually schoolchildren) will carry messages to legislators in the chamber. The public is not allowed on the House or Senate floor. Legislators will often leave the chamber to meet with anyone who summons them via a page, especially if its one of their constituents. Page desks are directly in front of the main doors leading to both chambers. Legislators offices are inside the Capitol and across Mitchell Street in the Coverdell Legislative Office Building. Be prepared to pass through metal detectors.

Online: The General Assembly's home page links to House and Senate members by name and by district. The directory lists the legislators office phone and e-mail. Some legislators also list home address and phone.

The White Book: Has photographs and bios of all 236 legislators. Download a copy from www.legis.state.ga.us (click on picture book at the bottom of the page).

Who are my legislators?

Use the Secretary of States poll locator service to learn your House and Senate districts and who represents you: www.sos.state.ga.us/cgi-bin/Locator.asp.

How to track bills:

In person: Find copies of bills in the House clerks office (Room 309) and the secretary of the Senates office (Room 353). Each has a desk where you can request a bill. Committee hearing notices are posted daily on a bulletin board outside both offices. House clerks office: 404-656-5015; secretary of the Senates office: 404-656-5040.

Online: Go to www.legis.state.ga.us and click on the legislation icon under either the House or the Senate, depending on where the bill you are tracking originated. This allows you to view the bill in its entirety, track it through committees and see roll call votes.

How to watch the action:

Business begins most days in the House and Senate chambers at 10 a.m., but legislators often arrive before that time. If you want to catch a legislator before the days session, try waiting at the velvet ropes outside the chamber. Each chamber also has a gallery on the fourth floor of the Capitol overlooking the floor. The hallways on the third floor have TV monitors that carry live feeds from the House and Senate. You will have to jockey with the lobbyists crowding the hallways for a good spot. The live video feeds are also available online at www.legis.state.ga.us.

How to follow the money:

At the State Ethics Commissions Web site - ethics.ga.gov - click on report search to see campaign finance disclosures, lobbyist disclosure reports and lawmakers personal finance disclosures. You can also request hard copies at the commissions offices in the James H. Sloppy Floyd Building. Call 404-463-1980 or 1-866-589-7327 for information.

How to speak at hearings:

The real work on bills is done in committees, and thats the place to weigh in on them. Contact committee members by phone, mail or e-mail to make your voice heard. Speaking in person before a committee, though, is one of the most effective ways to reach legislators. The experience can be a little daunting, but legislators sometimes appreciate hearing from the little guy. Most committees have a sign-up sheet for speakers. Try to keep your remarks short and to the point.

Cool stuff to see:

The Georgia Capitol Museum, fourth floor. History of the Capitol and the state.
The Capitol grounds feature more than a dozen monuments, including statues of several former governors, and a replica of the Statue of Liberty.

Where to park

Take MARTA. The Georgia State University station on the east/west line is a short walk from the Capitol. Most people drive nonetheless, even though parking is limited. Lots generally charge \$5 daily for parking.

Some options:

Pete Hackney Parking Deck (162 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive)

Steve Polk Parking Plaza (65 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive)

90 Central Parking Lot (accessible from Central Avenue and Courtland Street)

Archives Lot (entrance off Fraser Street)

Where to eat:

A Capitol snack bar on the bottom floor sells sandwiches, chips and drinks. Soft drink and snack machines outside the snack bar are accessible 24 hours a day. If your schedule allows, two state cafeterias serve hot food. One is on the sixth floor of the Coverdell building. The other is across the street from the Capitol on the bottom floor of the Sloppy Floyd twin towers.

Find this article at:

http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/stories/2009/01/07/georgia_legislature_guide.html

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Unlock the Waiting Lists Update from AADD:

During last year's legislative session, you may remember that the Unlock the Waiting Lists! Campaign opposed the transfer of \$27,019,584 in the FY2009 Department of Human Resources budget from Adult Developmental Disabilities (DD) Services. Unlock requested that the House place language in the FY09 DHR budget that requested an audit of these funds so that we could be clear that these funds were being transferred appropriately. A letter of this request can be found on the Unlock website at: <http://www.unlockthewaitinglists.com/RequestfromUnlock.pdf>

During testimony last year to the appropriate House and Senate committees, the Department of Human Resources (DHR) leadership maintained that this transfer was a correction for a surplus in the DD account and that these funds were originally intended for MH programs. They also stated that these funds were not currently funding DD services and that the transfer would have no affect on current supports. While DHR acknowledged that their ability to account for these dollars was poor, Unlock's position was that before these monies were moved permanently, an independent audit needed to be conducted to erase any reasonable doubt that these funds were originally intended at any time for DD services. We stated in the February 2008 letter to Representative Butler that Unlock had "more questions than answers" and that we hoped to erase any reasonable doubt through this audit.

Despite our request to wait on the audit, the transfer was made in the FY09 budget. However a request for the audit was placed by Representatives Harbin and Butler.

Their request can be found at: <http://www.unlockthewaitinglists.com/Requestofaudit.pdf>

The Department of Audit and Accounts report on the transfer of funds was released Oct 2008 and can be found at:
<http://www.unlockthewaitinglists.com/Auditreport.pdf>

The Department of Audits and Accounts' (DOAA) report found that making a "comprehensive audit of the records supporting the rationale for the transfer [was] impossible." They further stated that the more recent accounting data is "even in doubt." The only conclusion the audit reached was that "it appears DHR made a good faith effort to prevent the Adult MH program from exceeding its budget by transferring a projected state fund surplus from the Adult DD program." In other words a judgment was made that Mental Health needed these funds more than the DD system. We maintain that the question was and remains, "What was the Legislature's intended use of these funds when the funds were appropriated?" Unlock believes that with over 6,812 people waiting for developmental disability supports today, it is impossible for these funds to be "surplus." Instead, it is more likely that these funds represent monies that were either diverted from the Adult DD program before the Office of Developmental Disabilities could direct them to services or they were never made available to the Office of DD to be spent for people with developmental disabilities. It is our opinion that this finding is wholly inadequate and is contrary to the original justification given for the transfer which was that the funding was originally appropriated to Adult MH programs.

Unlock continues to maintain that the root cause for this issue are two under-funded systems. We believe that the decisions made at DHR's Division for MHDDAD were attempts to respond to the real crisis in the MH system based on their best information. With all respect to these real challenges, we feel that neither system's unmet needs should be funded at the expense of the other.

The accounting of these funds as well as all other DD funds is an especially important issue as the General Assembly and the Governor discuss a reorganization of the Department of Human

Resources. It will be most important that there is a clear accounting of the funds that belong to Adult DD and Adult MH before this restructuring takes place. Unlock supports fully funding MH programs and accepts the premise of the audit that these programs were experiencing a deficit. However, before a new Department of Behavioral Health is created separate from the Department of Human Services it will be important to know where each dollar comes from and the population it was originally designated to serve.

Unlock met with Representative Butler recently to present our concerns regarding the audit. Specifically, we raised our concerns that include:

1. There needs to be a clear strategy to ensure that through the reorganization of the Department of Human Resources, and an accounting of all DD related funds throughout DHR that belong to DD accounts before this restructuring takes place. We ask that at least a Division of Developmental Disabilities be established and that strategies be developed to ensure that regardless of where the Division of DD is placed in the new organizational chart, that the Division maintain authority and be held accountable for monies and programs appropriated for DD services and personnel all the way down to hospitals.
2. Given the lag in state reconciliation of Medicaid, the significant amount of recent new resources, and the large amount of funds involved in this transfer from the DD system, advocates need to be assured that the system will not experience a deficit for those currently being served in the future. This question is especially troublesome given the assessment by the Department and DOAA that the more recent accounting data is “even in doubt.”
3. On page 4, the audit states that with the 2007 transfer of \$23.3M, there remains a variance in the adult DD account of +\$16.9M. With the additional transfer of \$3.7M, this variance is \$13.3M. Does this mean that further transfers from DD to MH should be anticipated?

It is also important that Georgia honor our obligations to our citizens by ensuring that community service funds for persons with developmental disabilities be spent on community services only. We look forward to finding a resolution with DHR and stakeholders to this issue. Representative Butler has offered to schedule a public hearing on this issue, with a date to be set in the coming weeks.

Dave Blanchard
The Unlock the Waiting List Campaign