

Testimony to the House Education Committee on S 261 Section F

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Legislative Language

SECTION F REPORT; ALIGNMENT OF DESIGNATED AND SPECIALIZED SERVICE AGENCIES WITH SUPERVISORY UNIONS

On or before November 1, 2018, the Agencies of Education and of Human Services shall jointly submit a report containing recommendations to correct the misalignment between designated and specialized service agencies and supervisory unions in a manner that reduces the duplication and complexity of services provided in accordance with 1988 Acts and Resolves No. 264. The report shall be submitted to the House Committees on Education and on Human Services and to the Senate Committees on Education and on Health and Welfare.

Introduction

Thank you for your work on the Bill. The Agency of Human Services strongly supports the statewide focus on trauma and resiliency. AHS is currently working on a sustainable plan to become a trauma informed organization. This will be an ongoing, organization development process that will include each department. This work will help change the way we serve our customers and support our staff. We also know that we can't do it alone because trauma is a deeply entrenched social condition and that we have to work with other agencies and organizations both public and private to build capacity and resiliency. For instance, our Building Flourishing Communities initiative is statewide, community based work to build resiliency through a collective impact model. We are happy to further discuss that initiative at some point.

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The designated and specialized service agencies are governed by administrative rules on agency designation. Attempting to redistrict the geographical areas for each designation is logistically and procedurally difficult and will entail; a public process in each area; a shifting of state and local board composition; a redesign of the State System of Care Plan; a redesign of local agency planning; a restructuring of local partnerships, agreements and contracts and; a reallocation of funding. In addition, the Agency of Human Services (AHS) has to think broadly about alignment as it works within its own AHS districts as well as other statewide networks in which there may or not be alignment. This proposed redistricting while aligning with the Supervisory Unions may have the unintended consequence of misaligning with other service providers like the Community Action Programs and the Parent Child Centers. We are also currently realigning AHS Field Service Districts in Southern Vermont to more closely conform to the Designated Agency (DA) districts. We do not think we need a report to further understand the challenges with redistricting or opportunities for better coordination with the Agency of Education (AOE). With all the work planned for our mental health system we would rather use this opportunity to work with AOE and the school systems that border agency boundaries on better coordination and present that work back to the legislature.

Statewide Impact

The purpose of the agency designation is to assure that people in local communities receive services and supports, consistent with available funding, the state System of Care Plans, the local System of Care Plans, outcome requirements, regulations and the goals of the people we serve. Redistricting will necessitate updates and changes in each of these areas.

For example, DMH has a statewide Standing Committee that participates in the development of the State System of Care Plan. The Standing Committee is representative of the demographic makeup of the area served by the

agency. The members of the Committee have consumer representation who assure the service capacity in the geographical area meet the needs of eligible service recipients. Redistricting will change the Committee's composition and changes will have to be added to and agreed upon in the State System of Care plan.

Population and Agency Impact

In addition to the Statewide Committee there are Local Program Standing Committees for each *population* served. The Committee is involved in the development of a local system of care plan for the population that it represents. It advises the agency in establishing general priorities for resource allocation consistent with the Local System of Care Plan. Both the committee make-up and resource allocation may need to change based on redistricting. In addition, the Committee reviews and comments on complaints about services for the population they represent. Any redistricting will most likely result in complaints and grievances that may stall or derail the process.

Each *agency* is governed by a board made up of citizens who are representative of the demographic makeup of the area served by the agency. Any geographical redistribution will call for readjusting each local board based on the new geography. Any redistricting in the geographic area of a designated agency may be appealed by the designated agency through the appeal process detailed in Section 9 of the administrative rules.

Agencies receive funding from DMH and DAIL to establish, provide services and supports as agreed upon with the clients in the geographical area. Redistricting may change and upset these client agreements. In addition, agencies may contract with other entities for the provision of services. These contracts will need to be revised or ended due to redistricting

Each local *agency* has developed collaboration and working agreements with related community/human service agencies providing support services in the region. Redistricting will upset those current relationships and disband those working agreements.

The *agencies* must assure that a comprehensive, integrated, accessible and responsive array of services, staff, and supports is available within the designated geographical region to meet the service needs of eligible persons to ensure a continuum of services including crisis response. Each local agency plan will need to be revisited and modified through a community process. Redistricting will affect those current organizational plans and services requiring a substantive and well thought out revision.

Redistricting may also necessitate the need for re-designation from the Commissioner by written notice to the President of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director of the agency. If so, this will have to go through the public comment process and a public forum in the geographic area.

Conclusion

To conclude we can work closely with AOE in those areas that need better coordination and return to you with progress on that work. Redistricting will be procedurally difficult, costly and resource intensive. It may also negatively impact the communities and organizations with whom we work.