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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

September 17, 2025

Sent via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Marlana Hutchison
Deputy Secretary, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration
217 E Redwood Street, Suite 1300
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: Department of Disabilities community concerns

Dear Director Hutchison,

I appreciate the time and effort you have taken in the past to address the issues and concerns of my constituents. When caregivers of individuals in the Developmental Disabilities Community reach out to me, they are often writing from a place of frustration, fear, and confusion. My goal remains to reduce that confusion and ease the anxiety of this vulnerable population, who rely so heavily on the services and support provided through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).

Recently, I have heard significant concerns regarding the upcoming October 6, 2025, changes to the DDA manual and guidance. The issues being raised by families and caregivers in my district are deeply troubling and warrant urgent attention:

1. Self-Directed Services

- According to several constituents, they have received a significant proposed reduction in day-to-day caregiver hours. Families have expressed worry that such a reduction could negatively affect the safety and quality of life of their loved ones. Caregivers have reportedly felt frustrated and overwhelmed by what they perceive as sudden or poorly considered changes.
- Some families have also shared concerns that it is their understanding that relatives may no longer be eligible to serve as day-to-day service providers unless five outside applicants first decline the position. Is this information accurate? Constituents have expressed concern that this requirement could cause delays and potential risks, as relatives are often seen as the most trusted and reliable option for individuals whose needs cannot be met in traditional care settings.

I recognize that there have been instances of fraud involving family-member caregivers in the past, and I agree that these issues must be addressed to protect the integrity of the system. At the same time, many families feel that relatives remain the safest and most appropriate choice for meeting the unique needs of their loved ones. It is important that DDA and stakeholders work together to identify a practical solution that both prevents fraud and allows families to safely rely on qualified relatives for care.

2. DDA Vendors

- According to DDA vendors, there will now be a requirement for them to become full providers which, in many cases, may be financially impossible. Many of these vendors play a vital role in offering enriching activities, even if only for a few hours each week. Is there a path to exempt vendors providing limited-service hours from this requirement?
- The transition from vendor to provider can take up to six months. Families are worried about service gaps. Is DDA prepared to process these applications in a timely manner, and can a fast-track option be developed to prevent disruption of care?

3. Employee Benefits

- I have also been contacted by part-time employees serving as client staff who are being denied health insurance benefits previously approved through the hiring process. This inconsistency creates unnecessary hardship and confusion. What steps can be taken to ensure benefits are applied fairly and consistently?

4. Clarity and Communication

- Clients and advocates alike stress the urgent need for clear, accessible communication on upcoming changes, with adequate time to review, understand, and respond. This population cannot simply “go without” services. The trust being placed in DDA is enormous, and it must not be eroded by unclear or delayed communication.

Beyond these specific concerns, I want to underscore a broader systemic problem: backlogs at MDH/DDA. My office has forwarded several constituent cases to DDA in the past several months, and while I know your staff are doing their best, the response times are excessively long. Most families have already attempted to address their concerns before contacting my office, yet the long wait times both before and after reaching out to us remain unreasonably lengthy. Families are left in limbo, uncertain of what changes mean for their loved ones, while waiting weeks or even months for replies. These delays compound the anxiety families already face and further erode confidence in the system. While a case is under review or awaiting MDH/DDA response, is it possible to ‘pause’ changes in DDA services until all questions and/or concerns are addressed?

As a Senator, I am deeply concerned by the frequency of changes at DDA and the uncertainty that surrounds them. I respectfully request a summarized list of all changes made within the past year so that lawmakers, clients, and caregivers can remain fully informed. Transparency is the first step in rebuilding trust.

My commitment is to advocate for my constituents and ensure they have the support, clarity, and respect they deserve. I urge DDA to act swiftly to provide answers, reduce backlogs, and address the concerns of families ahead of the next scheduled DDA meeting. Together, we can ensure that services for individuals with developmental disabilities remain reliable, responsive, and compassionate.

Sincerely,

J.B. Jennings
Senator J.B. Jennings