

Policy Flash

The latest news, views & information on policy issues for Virginia's DD Council members
Vol. II, No. 2 February, 2004

In Virginia. . .

✎ **Governor Warner's '04-'06 Budget Proposal....**

... proposes an additional 25 Developmental Disabilities Waiver (DD Waiver) slots. Currently, the DD Waiver is serving 247 individuals, but 499 individuals are currently on the waiting list for the DD Waiver in Virginia, and hundreds more are waiting to be screened. The DD Waiver provides critical support to individuals with developmental disabilities such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy and mental retardation. DD Waiver services include respite care, assistive technology, supported employment, attendant care, companion services and other supports that enable individuals with disabilities to live at home or in community settings. Advocacy groups in Virginia are supporting budget amendments that would increase the number of and funding for new DD Waiver slots that are critically needed.

✎ **Virginia Examines Voter Fraud ...**

... and has determined that charges made in other states related to the use of new, touch-screen voting machines are unfounded. According to the January 22, 2004 issue of "Report on Disability Programs," Virginia is planning to use the new screens in some locations in upcoming elections to enhance accessibility to the voting process for people with disabilities. The touch-screen voting machines "give out auditory messages for blind voters who use headsets to receive prompts for casting their votes." The "Help America Vote Act" requires that states place at least one of these machines at each polling place by 2006.

✎ **VCU- RRTC Program Provides Supports...**

... for college students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders within existing campus service systems as reported in a recent article in "Impact" (Fall/Winter 2003-2004). "Impact" is published and distributed nationally by the Institute on Community Integration. The program, implemented by Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VCU-RRTC), in collaboration with the university's Disability Support Services Office, focuses on exploring and using technology to assist students with their academic work. Many students enter college with scant knowledge about the various forms of technology available to them such as test-to-speech software, speech recognition software, and electronic graphic organizers. VCU-RRTC's supported education program enables students to gain a better understanding about how they learn and use tools available to help them become independent and effective learners. The supported education program utilizes a consumer-driven, and highly individualized approach with proven results in assisting students with disabilities achieve academic success in higher education. VCU's Shannon McManus, Elizabeth Getzel, and Lori Briel are implementing the Academic Strategies for Achievement Program.

In the Nation. . .

✧ ***FY '05 Budget Proposal Includes White House Medicaid Initiatives....***

.....such as:

- “New Freedom” demonstrations (3) to provide respite services to caregivers of adults and children with disabilities and home and community based services for children currently in residential psychiatric facilities (\$13 million in '05 and \$256 million over the next 5 years)
- LIFE Accounts for individuals who self-direct their own community-based services to allow the to accumulate savings and retain eligibility for Medicaid and SSI (cost neutral)
- Spousal Exemption to extend Medicaid benefits to the spouse of a working disabled individual (\$17million in '05 and \$102 million over the next 5 years)
- Partnership for Long-Term Care would enable consumers to become eligible for Medicaid after their private insurance is used up, without divesting their assets—which is normally done for Medicaid.

✧ ***There is Growing Opposition....***

...by parents of children with disabilities to the reauthorization of IDEA as presented in current bills (HR. 1350 and S. 1248). The House bill (19 co-sponsors) has passed, and the Senate bill (14 co-sponsors) has been reported favorably from one of the committees considering it. (Source: NACDD)

✧ ***Accessible Design is Becoming...***

...popular since there is growing recognition that features embedded in universal design can benefit multiple demographic groups such as the elderly, families with small children, and people recovering from medical procedures, to name a few. Microsoft Corp. recently issued a report as part of a new public education campaign noting that 57 percent of current working-age computer users – many of whom are aging – may benefit from accessible technology because of losses in their vision, hearing, speech or cognitive abilities.

✧ ***Administration on Developmental Disabilities....***

...awarded a grant to the Ohio Dept. of Aging to study the impact of aging on caregivers for people with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities over 40 and caregivers over 60. The study confirmed anecdotal information that the caregiving role becomes harder to fulfill as parents age, and that it is important to engage in thoughtful planning for the time when parents must relinquish their caregiving role. Several recommendations were part of the study including development of a waiver to cover attorney's fees so families can get legal assistance in developing long-range care plans that are financially sound. As part of the grant the Ohio DoA developed a curriculum on aging caregivers and other informational materials related to the study.

✎ Policy Flash is an e-publication of Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council—the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities. The publication is funded with federal funds under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (P.L. 106-402, 2000). The publication is available in alternative format by request. For comments and feedback contact Dr. Barbara J. Ettner at ettnerbj@vbpd.state.va.us).