

Policy Flash

*The latest news, views & information on policy issues regarding Virginia's service system
for people with developmental and other disabilities*

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In Virginia. . .

Governor's Budget Includes \$1.5 Million...

... for state-funded housing supplements for people with disabilities who are institutionalized and, under Olmstead, are eligible to move into the community. Although public awareness about Olmstead's requirements has improved in recent years, lack of affordable housing has been a major barrier to successful transition for persons seeking to live in community-based settings. Among a number of other proposed budget items, the Governor has sought increased funding for Virginia's Centers for Independent Living, for expansion of the public guardianship program, for additional waiver services, and for improvements in adult living facilities. (Talking Points, Deal Lynch, Deputy Secretary HHR, Jan 10, 2005.)

Several National "Hot Button" Issues Are Critical in Virginia...

... because, based on recent national elections and pending statewide elections, the fate of several key initiatives-- important to disability stakeholders-- is unclear. Important areas that advocates will be watching include: waiver funding and development—particularly those that strengthen the capacity of people with disabilities to live in the community of their choice; maintaining the impetus of the president's New Freedom Initiative and the Independence Plus waiver; keeping an eye on the federal Department of Education's regulation development process (to implement last year's Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act); tracking the impact on discretionary programs (for people with disabilities) of potential "budget cuts" in 2006; watching developments regarding Social Security reform; analyzing the impact of the expiration -- in January, 2006 -- of prescription coverage protections for persons who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid (the "dual eligibles"); maintaining the momentum of "Money Follows the Person" initiatives; evaluating the impact of the failure to extend the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, and many other issues with outcomes that could significantly impact Virginians with disabilities. (Information excerpted from Report on Disability Law, V. 28, No. 1, Jan, 2005)

Virginia Housing Development Authority ...

... will be able to raise \$396.6 million through the issuance of tax-exempt bonds to fund affordable housing initiatives. In announcing the bond allocations, Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner noted, " ... those buying their first home can benefit from lower rates offered by VHDA. It also means that affordable multifamily housing projects will continue to be built across the state. In addition, these allocations will be used to ...assist those with disabilities and special needs." (Governor's Policy Office, Press Release, January, 2005)

Governor Warner Continues Olmstead Initiative...

That he established through Executive Order 61 in 2004 and continued in 2005 with Executive Order 84. Executive Order 84 continues the Community Integration Oversight Advisory Committee, with additional duties and responsibilities, and the Community Integration Implementation Team with the same duties assigned previously. The position of Director of Community Integration within the Governor's Policy Office is also continued with additional duties and responsibilities.

In the Nation ...

The Family Opportunity Act Was Reintroduced...


... last Wednesday, January 26, 2005. Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), Ranking Member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, re-introduced the Family Opportunity Act (FOA) – legislation designed to help children with disabilities by creating options for families of children with disabilities to buy into Medicaid while continuing to work. In a press release, the Senators state that the FOA is “pro-work because it lets parents work without losing their children’s health coverage, pro-family because it encourages parents to work and build a better life for their children, and its pro-taxpayer because it means more parents continue to earn money, pay taxes and pay their own way for Medicaid coverage for their children.” (Legislative Advocacy Weekly, V2, No 2, January 31, 2005)

Disability Advocates Raise Questions About Reforms Proposed for...

... Social Security. They note, for example, that many people with disabilities, not just elderly retired workers, would be affected by any changes that might be made how the program is funded. The Old Age Survivors Insurance and Disability (OASID) component of Social Security includes elderly retired workers with disabilities; the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) component of the program provides supplemental support for many people with disabilities (SSDI) whose incomes are below the poverty level even when they are covered by other programs. Advocates wonder about the impact of privatization of the Social Security Trust Fund on the “family” of Social Security programs that support people with disabilities, family members and survivors. Approximately 47 million people currently receive monthly Social Security payments under one or more of the Social Security programs. Approximately 8 million disabled workers and dependents rely on SSDI. Disability advocates are committed to being “at the table” for all pertinent discussions related to the issue of privatization. (stevegoldADA Information Bulletin #77, January, 2005)

National Study On State’s Use of Nursing Homes...

... found that, compared to the general nursing home population, individuals with developmental disabilities were: 1) younger -- 64 years vs. 80 years; 2) less likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer’s -- 6% vs. 13%; 3) had higher rates of incontinence -- 48% vs. 42%; and 4) were more likely to use feeding tubes -- 12% vs. 7%. In general, the study which was conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Aging with Developmental Disabilities (at University of Illinois, Chicago), found an inverse relationship between the use of state operated institutions and the amount of money spent on Medicaid home and community-based waivers. States that spent more money on Medicaid nursing homes and community-based waiver services were less likely to use state-operated institutions. The study can be found at <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/rrtcamr/research12.html>.

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