

ASSEMBLY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 4988

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 17, 2021

The Assembly Human Services Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 4988.

As amended by the committee, this bill establishes the New Jersey Direct Support Professional (DSP) Core Competency Working Group, an in but not of entity in the Department of Human Services (DHS). The purpose of this working group, in partnership with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) in the DHS, is to adopt a set of standard Statewide DSP competencies designed to ensure a more consistent level of expertise among DSPs who provide supports in New Jersey's adult intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) community.

DSPs are the primary providers of publicly funded long-term support and services for individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are supported by these professionals in making choices that lead to meaningful, productive lives and these professionals are integral in helping individuals with disabilities live within their communities amongst friends and family, avoiding more costly institutional care.

With a growing demand, due to high turnover, persistent vacancies, a shrinking labor pool, competition with other service sectors, and the aging of family caregivers, it is critical that staff be effectively trained and supervised to deliver high quality supports to the I/DD community. Training that uses a competency-based approach is purposefully designed to result in the DSP being able to demonstrate skills related to the identified, standard competency set. Competency-based training is an avenue to achieve a highly knowledgeable, skilled, and engaged workforce, resulting in a higher quality of life for individuals who use direct support services.

As amended, under the bill, the working group is to include 21 members, as follows:

- 1) The Commissioner of Human Services, or the commissioner's designee, and the Director of the Division of DDD, or the director's designee, who both serve ex officio; and

- 2) 19 public members appointed by the Commissioner of Human Services who include: one representative each from the Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, the Arc of New Jersey, the New Jersey

Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities, the New Jersey Association of Community Providers, Autism New Jersey, the Family Support Coalition of New Jersey, the Family Resource Network, the New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network, the New Jersey Community College Consortium, the Mental Health Association of New Jersey, the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, the Statewide Regional Family Support Planning Councils; and two individuals currently employed as DSPs, two individuals who are family members of individuals within the I/DD community who are supported by DSPs, one individual within the I/DD community who is supported by DSPs, and one individual with a medical background that has knowledge or experience with the I/DD community.

The members of the group, at a minimum, are directed to:

- 1) compile nationally recognized DSP and frontline supervisor competency sets, as well as best practices in DSP training as implemented by industry-recognized entities;
- 2) investigate National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals accredited training programs and, as needed, obtain information about how to get new programs accredited;
- 3) perform a Statewide survey of training opportunities offered at organizations that provide community services to adults with I/DD and employ DSPs and frontline supervisors, and identify any gaps in that training to support a knowledgeable and skilled direct support workforce;
- 4) adopt, through a collaborative process with stakeholders, the New Jersey DSP Core Competency Standards targeted to the needs of the State's I/DD system and outlining the comprehensive series of skill, knowledge, and ethical standards that DSPs working in the State must master;
- 5) develop evaluation and documentation tools for use by frontline supervisors and other facility managers to support DSPs in meeting the New Jersey DSP Core Competency Standards; and
- 6) identify and compile an online library of in-person and virtual learning resources for each area of the New Jersey DSP Core Competency Standards.

The bill directs the working group to organize as soon as practicable following the appointment of its members. The Commissioner of Human Services is to select a public member of the group to serve as co-chair, alongside the Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, or the director's designee. The bill directs the co-chairpersons to appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the working group.

The public members are to serve without compensation, but are to be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and within the limits of funds available to the working group. Furthermore, the working group is to be entitled to the

assistance and services of the employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available for its purposes. The Department of Human Services is required to provide staff support to the working group.

As amended by the committee, the bill stipulates that upon completion of the tasks outlined in the bill, and no later than 12 months after the working group organizes, the working group is required to report to the Governor and the Legislature a summary of its actions, as well as recommendations regarding the: (1) adoption of the New Jersey Core Competency Standards and the implementation of a State DSP Certificate or credentialing process; (2) adoption of a Front Line Supervisor Core Competency Set; and (3) continuation of the working group beyond the scope of this act in order to achieve these goals.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amendments expand the membership of the working group, from 19 to 21 members, to: include one representative each from the Mental Health Association of New Jersey and the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies; and replace one individual within the I/DD community who is supported by DSPs with one individual with a medical background that has knowledge or experience with the I/DD community .

The committee amendments also direct the working group to submit the summary of its actions, along with any recommendations, as required under the bill, no later than 12 months after the group organizes.