

ASSEMBLY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 5248

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 25, 2021

The Assembly Human Services Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 5248.

This bill establishes the Advisory Committee on Family Services and Communications in the Division of Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Human Services. The purpose of the advisory committee will be to identify, and work with division leadership to redress, any inefficiencies, shortcomings, or other problems that may be associated with the division's outreach to, communications with, or provision of appropriate services and supports to, the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities.

The advisory committee is to be composed of nine members, including the division's Family Outreach Liaison and Communications and Constituent Inquiries Liaison, as well as the chair of the Family Advisory Council, or their designees, who would serve ex officio, and six public members to be appointed by the Governor. The six public members are to include: 1) three residents, one from each of the northern, central, and southern regions of the State, who are family members of an individual with a developmental disability; and 2) three residents, one from each of the northern, central, and southern regions of the State, who are legal guardians of an individual with a developmental disability. The advisory committee will be required to organize as soon as practicable, but not more than 30 days after the appointment of a majority of its members.

Under the bill's provisions, the Advisory Committee on Family Services and Communications will have the duty to:

- 1) provide the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities with comprehensive information, upon request, regarding: the nature and details of the agency's family outreach and communications systems, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices; the nature and type of services and supports that are available from the division to assist the family members and guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities; and any proposed or actualized changes in these areas;

- 2) engage in the ongoing evaluation of existing division systems, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices that are used to facilitate the division's outreach to, communications with, and

provision of services and supports to, the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities, and determine the extent to which those systems, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices, or components thereof, are resulting in inefficiencies, ineffectiveness, or a lack of transparency or responsiveness in association with the division's outreach to, communications with, or provision of services and supports to, the family members or legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities;

3) solicit, receive, and review complaints, suggestions, and recommendations from relevant organizations and from the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities regarding the ways in which the division can improve its systems, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices to more efficiently, effectively, transparently, and respectfully serve and respond to the needs, questions, and concerns of the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities;

4) identify elements within the division's existing systems, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices that can be improved or modernized, and other remedial actions that can be undertaken by division staff, to redress the inefficiencies or other problems identified by the committee; and

5) recommend, and work with division leadership to facilitate the implementation of, changes to the division's systems, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices, as may be necessary to ensure that division staff is consistently engaging in efficient, effective, responsive, and fully transparent outreach to, communications with, and provision of appropriate services and supports to, the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities. Recommendations developed by the committee are to be presented, in writing, to the Assistant Commissioner of the Division of Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Human Services, within one year after the bill's effective date and annually thereafter.

In effectuating its duties under the bill, the advisory committee will be authorized to:

1) consult with, and solicit and receive testimony, information, documents, and input from, division staff, relevant external organizations, and the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities; and

2) solicit and receive, from the Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families, any complaints received by the ombudsman that involve concerns related to the division's outreach to, communications with, or provision of services and supports to, the family members or guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities. The

ombudsman will be required to promptly provide the advisory committee, upon request, with any such complaints received thereby.

The advisory committee is to meet at the times and places designated by the chair, but not less than twice per year. The committee may conduct business without a quorum, but may only vote on recommendations when a quorum is present.

The division will be required to provide professional, stenographic, and clerical staff, support, and resources to the advisory committee, as may be necessary to ensure the proper effectuation of the committee's duties. The division will also be required to publish, on its Internet website, the names of the committee's members and the contact information that can be used by relevant organizations, and by the family members and legal guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities, to submit questions, concerns, or suggestions to the committee. The website is to be updated within 10 days following any change in the committee membership.