

VOR Action Item Reminders

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VOR Weekly E-Mail Update
September 4, 2009

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Budget Updates and Woes

- 1. FEDERAL:** Current Status and Policy Implications of the Money Follows the Person Demonstration - Free Webinar Opportunity.
- 2. CALIFORNIA:** Families Express Thanks to Lanterman Direct Care Staff Facing Furloughs
- 3. WISCONSIN:** State might give overtime pay - and furloughs - to same workers
- 4. CONNECTICUT:** Caregivers, families rally against privatization - Shift means worse care for patients

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1. FEDERAL: Current Status and Policy Implications of the Money Follows the Person Demonstration - Free Webinar Opportunity.

Free Webinar Opportunity:
Sponsored by Center For Studying Disability Policy / Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Topic: "Current Status and Policy Implications of the Money Follows the Person Demonstration"
Date: September 24, 2009
Time: 12:00 - 1:30 pm EASTERN

Overview: States have been striving to increase the capacity of long-term care systems to help more people with disabling conditions stay in the community rather than in institutions. The MFP demonstration, administered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), represents the next major step in these efforts. The program has important implications for people with disabling conditions, particularly during this period of health care reform. Mathematica senior researchers Carol Irvin and Debra Lipson will present an overview of the program; describe where

states began in this process and the opportunities MFP presents to improve home and community care options; discuss the progress of state MFP programs; and explain the challenges states face in the early stages of implementation. The speakers will also highlight the potential of state MFP programs to relocate long-term institutional residents under age 65 versus those older than 65. Ruth Katz will discuss how the MFP demonstration fits into the evolution of policies and models designed to rebalance the long-term care system.

For More Information: <http://www.disabilitypolicyresearch.org/Forums/CSDPflier-Sept09.pdf>

To Register: <http://www.disabilitypolicyresearch.org/researchforums.asp>

2. CALIFORNIA: Families Express Thanks to Lanterman Direct Care Staff Facing Furloughs

Parents Coordinating Council Lanterman Developmental Center

CONTACT - The Newsletter for Parents and Friends

Vol. V, No. 1

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We want to wholeheartedly thank all of our staff members throughout Lanterman who have worked so hard under the current difficult economic times to make Lanterman a better place for our loved ones!

Many of you probably are not aware that due to the extreme difficulty of our state's budgetary woes, our staff has been asked to take 3 furlough days off each month without pay. But think about it, being short-handed already, they cannot physically take the day off to comply with the mandate. They have chosen to be on campus and to take care of our loved ones without pay.

These are certainly the qualities of a compassionate and professional staff. We can't be more proud of them!

3. WISCONSIN: State might give overtime pay - and furloughs - to same workers

By JASON STEIN

Wisconsin State Journal - August 28, 2009

State officials are considering furloughing some 200 workers who determine Social Security benefits for the disabled at the same time they are forcing those employees to work costlier overtime hours.

To help close a gaping budget hole, the state is furloughing almost all of its employees, including the workers who help decide who can claim federal disability payments, even though furloughing those workers won't actually save money because they're paid by the federal government.

With the recession leading more people nationwide to seek disability payments, federal officials - including Vice President Joe Biden - have urged states not to furlough workers who could speed up benefits for vulnerable state residents.

"For the good of the country, this has to end," Commissioner of Social Security Michael Astrue said in July, referring to furloughs and hiring freezes imposed by states on disability workers.

To save money, Gov. Jim Doyle has ordered 16 unpaid furlough days over two years for nearly all state workers and vowed those unpaid leaves would not increase overtime.

Earlier this month, 50 state Division of Motor Vehicles workers were offered overtime a week after they were furloughed for a day. Even though the disability workers are paid with federal dollars, the agency is imposing the furloughs on them in an effort to treat all employees fairly, said Department of Health Services spokeswoman Stephanie Smiley.

"Wisconsin is not alone; a number of states have also elected to furlough employees performing these duties in the spirit of being fair," Smiley said in an e-mail.

'It's a problem'

The 206 state employees in the agency's Disability Determination Bureau determine whether applicants fit the definition of disabled under federal Social Security rules.

Nationwide, disability payments to those who qualify amount to \$11 billion each month and go to 12.1 million citizens.

Rising poverty and the national economic crisis are leading more people to seek disability benefits and adding to the backlog in claims - a 14 percent increase in Wisconsin so far this year over last year, Smiley said. Lynn Breedlove, executive director of the advocacy group Disability Rights Wisconsin, said he was concerned about the effect of the backlog on needy citizens who may qualify for payments.

"It's a problem, and on the face of it, it sure sounds like furloughs could make it worse," Breedlove said.

The state disability workers were ordered this week to work six hours of overtime, or 46 hours total, each week for the next nine weeks, Smiley said. The workers are paid time and a half for their overtime hours.

Those workers also have to take eight furlough days this year.

A possible furlough day for them would be on Columbus Day, Oct. 12, since federal Social Security Administration offices are closed that day, she said.

A spokeswoman for Senate Minority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, said the policy didn't make sense because it could increase overtime costs.

"Either they shouldn't furlough them at all or they should furlough them during low-volume times of the year," Kimberly Liedl said.

Smiley said some mental institutions run by her agency are regularly offering overtime but that she was not aware of any other agency programs that were requiring overtime.

She noted the state Office of Employment Relations will be examining overtime use by state agencies later this fall to ensure it is not being increased by the furloughs.

4. CONNECTICUT: Caregivers, families rally against privatization - Shift means worse care for patients

By JOHN PENNEY
Norwich Bulletin
Aug 20, 2009

Brooklyn, Conn. - State caregivers and the family members of developmentally challenged individuals rallied in front of a Brooklyn group home Thursday, protesting that a plan to close or privatize several homes will mean a lower quality of care for patients.

But state officials said the order to close local group homes was prompted by structural, not financial, concerns.

The roughly dozen protesters, many of them members of New England Healthcare Employees Union, District 1199, linked Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposal to privatize nearly two dozen Connecticut residential homes with a state Department of Developmental Services decision to shutter four others.

"The major problem is that moving these people to another home will mean an interruption in the continuity of care," said Matt Mason, a union representative.

Most of these patients have been here for more than 10 years and turning them over to another group of caregivers is like eliminating the family unit they're familiar with."

Other workers waved handmade signs at traffic Thursday outside the Windham Road home while lambasting Rell for putting money before patient care.

But the decision to close the Brooklyn home, along with three other unidentified facilities, was arrived at independently from Rell's plan, department spokeswoman Joan Barnish said.

"There are problems with something in each house that prompted the close orders," she said. "It is not related to the conversion plan."

Union spokeswoman Deborah Chernoff said she didn't believe that explanation.

"If that's the case, they could keep patients and care-givers together, just in a different building," she said.

Community Living Arrangements, or group homes, in Connecticut are overseen by the state Department of Developmental Services. The homes typically serve six or fewer residents and are operated either by the state or private agencies.

According to an Aug. 19 department statement, 17 state-run group homes serving 93 people will be turned over to private providers within the next nine months. Now, 778 of the 873 group homes in Connecticut are operated privately.

Barnish said the conversion plan was forwarded after 395 department employees announced their retirement earlier this year. Once implemented, the plan is expected to save roughly \$5 million and will not require the involuntary elimination of any jobs.

Patients living in homes slated for conversion will not be required to move, though caregiving duties will be taken over by private workers.

For Margaret Ouillette, the specifics of why the Windham Road home is closing is secondary to the effect it will have on her 48-year-old son, one of five patients at the Brooklyn group home.

Ouillette, of Brooklyn, described her son as a "profoundly retarded" epileptic who requires round-the-clock care.

"He's not used to strangers, so this change will shock him," she said.

Editor: Tamie Hopp, VOR Director of Government Relations & Advocacy

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