

**Office of Protection and Advocacy
For Persons with Disabilities
Priorities for 2012-2013**

1. Protect rights, identify barriers, and increase awareness of benefits related to community inclusion of people with disabilities.

- Working with Advocacy Board and DD Network, educate policymakers and the public regarding barriers to living and working in communities by; 1) conducting and participating in legislative and administrative forums and hearings. (DD)
- Ensure that state and local disaster preparedness planning includes needs of people with disabilities. (AT, DD)
- Continue rights-based advocacy for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, focusing on communications access in health care and law enforcement situations.* (PAIR)
- Support efforts to survey and improve access to state facilities.
- Support efforts to improve and expand relevant community mental health services and oppose efforts to establish out-patient commitment and expand other coercive mechanisms

2. Safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities living in congregate institutions or at risk of institutionalization.

- Advocate for the rights of people with developmental disabilities, brain injuries, and mental illness who are incarcerated or are at risk of incarceration, and evaluate quality of mental health treatment available to inmates in selected prison environments.* (PAIR, DD, PAIMI)
- Investigate selected suicides and restraint-related deaths of prisoners and patients in psychiatric hospitals.* (PAIMI)
- Continue to provide advocacy to residents of Southbury Training School.* (DD)
- Enforce Patients' Bill of Rights including representation to contest involuntary use of psychotropic medication.* (PAIMI)
- Conduct interviews with children involved in restraint and/or seclusion incidents reported pursuant to 42 CFR 483.374(b).* (PAIMI)
- Conduct site visits to Connecticut mental health facilities and residential care homes to identify patient's rights issues. (PAIMI)
- Conduct outreach to residents of long-term care facilities and advocate for appropriate transitioning for those wishing to move to their own homes.* (PAIMI)
- Increase OPA presence in environments that house and/or educate children with psychiatric disabilities; transition self advocacy training to children and staff leaders in one facility while establishing a sister program at another residential facility for children with mental illness.
- Increase awareness of resources and information for families of children who have mental health needs with a focus on children in treatment facilities. (PAIMI)

3. Decrease exposure to abuse and neglect by increasing awareness of factors and dynamics that contribute to them, and by pursuing targeted, collaborative initiatives addressing them.

- Analyze and increase public reporting of agency data regarding abuse and neglect.
- Pursue restraint and seclusion data from agencies assigned oversight roles in Public Act 99-210, with an eye towards publishing summary information. (DD, PAIMI)
- Review, investigate and report on deaths of clients of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) where abuse and neglect are suspected to have played a role. (DD, PAIMI)
- Identify problems and pursue corrections related to health care coordination for people who are clients of DMHAS and DDS; support Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council public forum on health care. (DD, PAIMI)
- Pursue inter-agency training initiatives to decrease choking risks and empower caregivers to effectively advocate for rights and needs of people with disabilities in healthcare environments.

4. Protect educational rights of children with disabilities as mandated by IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

- Promote appropriate educational opportunities for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities especially when the student is at risk of being subjected to restraint and seclusion.* (PAIR, DD)
- Represent families where the lack of appropriate programming and supports results in or creates a risk of an education program in a more restrictive setting.* (PAIR, DD)
- In collaboration with parent organizations, create mechanisms to inform parents and parent groups about the educational rights of their children with disabilities and responsibilities of school systems (e.g. child-find, timely referrals for evaluation, array of relevant program options)
- Support parents of students with disabilities through information and referral services, group trainings, technical assistance and by organizing clinics at which parents and students can review records and develop problem solving strategies. (PAIR, DD).
- Provide advocacy representation for students with disabilities to assist in the development of appropriate transition plans.* (PAIR, DD)
- Represent children with mental health needs who are at risk of institutional placement at educational meetings in the public school system.* (PAIMI)

5. Educate individuals with disabilities about employment rights, support options and mechanisms to address discrimination; build capacity to provide legal representation for people with disabilities who experience employment discrimination.

- Pursue “Employment First” initiative in Connecticut by collaborating with disability organizations to educate policymakers and representing individuals with disabilities who are being denied real work for real pay. (DD)

- Provide representation for people who have experienced discrimination in employment because of their disabilities.*(PAIR)
- Promote awareness of employment rights for people with mental illness (PAIMI).

6. Housing

- Identify and selectively join coalitions and organizations addressing the unavailability of affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities and families. (PAIR)
- Increase staff awareness about different supportive housing models and options.
- Continue to contest discriminatory housing practices and proposals.* (PAIR)

7. Increase Awareness Regarding Health Care Rights and Options for People with Disabilities in Connecticut.

- Continue to focus attention of public and policymakers on the need for health care coordination and standards for people with disabilities, including people living in state hospitals and with minimal supports in community.
- Identify physical health barriers for people with mental illness and develop materials to assist physicians serving people with mental illness in various health care settings. (PAIMI)
- Promote awareness and discussion of restraint/seclusion for children in the mental health system. (PAIMI)
- Support inter-agency initiative to reduce use of restraint and seclusion in state-supported or regulated environments.
- Develop a “toolkit” explaining elements of informed consent for healthcare interventions.
- Explore possibility of establishing an effective complaint mechanism for users of medical transportation services.
