

Maine Annual Report to VOR June 2022

I just noticed that my 2019 report began with “This has been a year of uncertainty and change.” I’m beginning to believe that most years are. This year has passed with first high hopes of recognition of the value of DSPs and of what appeared to be a great adjustment in wages. Last year a study chaired by two legislators seemed to bring a positive vote from the legislative committee but was left “on the table” at the session’s close. This year’s session was met with many other challenges for social services and a misunderstanding of the costs entailed to make such systems work. It was initially announced that our needs were addressed satisfactorily by the State, but further research questions whether much of the money was simply transferred from the administrative budget of agencies, leaving operations funds cut. Frankly, at this point, I am not sure what the current status is. I only know that many long-term DSPs have left the system for work in other fields and although new staff have been hired, they are still in the process of training. There are such things as language difficulties and even a shortage of people with driver’s licenses, leaving transportation an issue. One agency director wrote that a 35% staffing deficit seems consistent throughout the system. Needless to say, this leads to being triggered as Heightened Scrutiny as described in the Transition Plan for HCBS Settings. And this leads to wondering how well they understand the situations involved. COVID and staff shortages have led to a lack of community integration.

Maine’s State Transition Plan for implementing the Federal Home and Community Based Services Rule was printed on April 29, 2022 with a public hearing on May 10th. Our families were well represented with thoughtful and comprehensive comments... and the ship sails on It is always difficult to judge what effect this has had until the process unfolds, but it did get press coverage. Many families were involved in other legislation to ease the strain on our faltering system and support seemed likely until the very last moments of the State budget development when we began to hear things like “... but they are getting so much money already!” And all we know is that it was cut. The juggling of details is within the department’s current work.

Maine ended subminimum wages (14c) officially in December 2019. Comments I received included that it had been inactive for more than a year previous to this action. Before that, only one company had been using it and had trouble in meeting its requirements, I heard from no families complaining about the present system, and it is to receive more attention through a joint effort with Education and the Dept of Labor.

There are sixteen ICFs in Maine: 13 are ICF Nursing and 3 are ICF Group. One parent offered to provide me with more information if needed. The State is very quiet about its ICFs. I have heard no complaints although COVID must have had an impact.

Retarding Waitlists, reports are supposed to be quarterly, but it can vary. The last one I received was in a graph form and parents’ complaints include the fact that those who are waiting for Section 21 services and are receiving other services are tabulated by the fact they are getting other services but may receive only a fraction of those allocated services due to staffing shortages. A more accurate picture would be listing the number of hours they are eligible for vs the number of hours they receive.

Last statistics posted:

	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Waitlist</u>	<u>With Other Coverage</u>	<u>Without Other Coverage</u>
(Section 21)	3,258	2,027	1,588	439
(Section 29)	2,575	247	117	117

A bright spot: A large Coalition of many groups (including parents, self-advocates, other organizations involved with special needs of many kinds, and Dept. representatives of related State and Local agencies and divisions have returned to the monthly meetings either by ZOOM or in-person when that is feasible. Although we sometimes even have trouble with the biggest problems, the guest speaker list is amazing and all pertinent fields are welcome. State agencies give a quick update as do any others so inclined. It’s a beginning. We hope to be building personal relationships as well as sharing information.

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