



Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services
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March 13, 2024

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chairwoman
House Committee on Health & Human Services
State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: House Bill 2024- 7821

Dear Chairwoman Donovan:

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to express concerns regarding H7821. This legislation creates an Olmstead Plan Commission that would be “a public instrumentality exercising public and essential government functions” whose membership shall include 19 ex officio members who are directors of certain state agencies and 6 members from the general public who live with disabilities appointed by the Governor with advice and consent of the Senate. The legislation also authorizes the commission to appoint and employ an executive director who will act as chief administrative officer having general charge of the office. The Commission would also set the salary of any necessary personnel.

EOHHS has concerns about creating a separate public body that performs key executive branch functions, adds additional staff to state government, and is duplicative of the work at EOHHS. If enacted, 2024-7821 would create another new government body. Several provisions of this legislation conflict with typical public bodies. For example, this legislation, if enacted, would empower a separate government entity to appoint an executive director as well as necessary personnel to serve at the executive director’s pleasure, who shall be in the unclassified service, with salaries set by the commission. Standing up a new government body takes significant time, effort, and resources. EOHHS is concerned that this new body will slow the progress that has been made in creating an Olmstead Plan.

EOHHS’ efforts to date are guided by the U.S. Department of Justice requirements, the guidance and direction of the Governor’s Administration, and input from the community. In addition, the FY2024 budget awarded EOHHS with 2 additional FTEs. On October 1, 2023, EOHHS hired one employee to coordinate Olmstead initiatives and is currently recruiting a Community Engagement Specialist to coordinate community conversations with advocacy organizations and consumers for Olmstead and other related program changes, to improve service delivery and client experience.

EOHHS has been using a four phased approach including project planning and capacity building, community engagement and information gathering, data analytics and joint prioritization, and plan drafting and accountability to guide its work through Spring 2025. EOHHS shares an update on Olmstead initiatives with the Governor’s Council on Behavioral Health monthly and has met with the Olmstead sub-committee several times. Stakeholder input to date has been gathered from representatives from over twenty (20) organizations and over thirty (30) individuals. EOHHS has also designed a draft facilitation guide for ongoing Olmstead community input sessions for community engagement, including smaller focus groups with individuals experiencing homeless and other harder to reach populations to ensure that their voices are strongly represented in these efforts.



EOHHS's Olmstead work to date has been supported by subject-matter experts from various State agencies such as the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Development Disabilities, and Hospitals, the Department of Health, the Department of Housing, and the Office of Management and Budget.

The State is committed to continuing this work in partnership with the Governor McKee Administration, the General Assembly, our Rhode Island community partners, and our constituency to ensure our vision for Rhode Island is realized: ***“Resilient, equitable, and just communities nurturing the health, safety, wellbeing, and independence of all Rhode Islanders.”***

I appreciate your leadership and hard work on behalf of all Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,



Richard Charest, R. Ph., MBA
Secretary
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

CC: Honorable Members of the House Committee Health & Human Services
Honorable David Bennett
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy

