DISABILITY TASK FORCE MEETING—October 18, 2023

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Commissioner Wolf

Impact of the Workforce Shortage/MRC’s New Initiatives

On October 18th DTF hosted MRC Commissioner Toni Wolf who discussed the impact of the workforce shortage and provided an overview of MRC initiatives.

Below are some highlights of Commissioner Wolf’s presentation to the Disability Task Force:

* While MRC has vacant positions, the department is prioritizing hiring for community sites where positions are now largely filled. MRC has also launched an internal workforce development committee to address hiring and retention issues.
* MRC has been utilizing social media (such as Tic Toc and Instagram) preferred by youth in order to more effectively reach young adults with disabilities who turned 22 during the pandemic who might be eligible to receive additional services through DESE’s initiative to provide Coordinated Pandemic-Related Transition services.
* As part of the collaboration process across agencies, MRC staff provide outreach to those about to be terminated from MassHealth and provide information on how to get assistance on completing necessary forms they receive in the mail.
* The Commissioner and Michelle Banks, the MRC Strategic Director for NEXTGEN, spoke about MRC’s NextGen program for individuals 18-30. NextGen supports career-ready youth or youth transitioning into employment to explore career options, build career skills, and also build, self-advocacy, self-capacity, and self-realization skills. Over 400 adults have received NextGen services in this first year, and half of these individuals have autism and/or ID. MRC is prioritizing outreach to immigrant and multi-lingual families to help address access barriers these families have experienced in the past.
* Commissioner Wolf and Manel Desvallons, MRC Family Partnership Coordinator for the Learning and Community Engagement Department discussed their initiatives focused on strengthening MRC partnerships with families. MRC hired a diverse group of family members who are participating in MRC decision-making, outreach, and engagement as they work on different projects to empower families and equip them with the tools and info they need.

After the Commissioners presentation, there was a Q&A and discussion with DTF members.

Click here for [recording of meeting](https://youtu.be/JgHdov_TWZ0)

Information and Resources provided by DTF members:

* Kristen Tenglin - The Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress is gearing up for our Annual Educators Forum, Empowering Educators, Schools and Communities Through Best Practices in Inclusive Education, which will return in person on Tuesday, November 14th at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA. This conference attracts over 250 general and special educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, support professionals, and parents to attend a full day of presentations led by experts in the field on educating learners with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. For more information and to register, visit <https://mdsc.donordrive.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.event&eventID=525>
* John Kaiser - EPIC Service Warrior Program - Service-learning program for youth with disability.  Application here: <https://epicleaders.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/epicleaders/survey.jsp?surveyId=1&>
* Julie McKinney - Exceptional Lives has just renovated our website, which has information, support and resources for parents of kids and young adults with disabilities. We have a hub of information on transitioning to adulthood. [www.exceptionallives.org](http://www.exceptionallives.org)
* Janet Barbieri - AANE Fall 2023 Conference: <https://aane.org/2023-daniel-w-rosenn-conference-details/>
* For anyone who knows an autistic adult who is grieving any kind of loss, including the death of an animal companion, the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation has partnered on an extensive website:  <https://www.autismandgrief.org>