

TO: Senator Renee Erickson, Chair
Senator Committee on Government Efficiency

FROM: Liz Holle, Deputy Operations Officer for Big Lakes Developmental Center

DATE: February 6, 2025

RE: Concerns Regarding Proposed System Changes

My name is Liz Holle, and I am writing to you as a service provider who is deeply concerned about the upcoming changes that the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services is planning to implement for individuals with I/DD, particularly the overhaul of day services to take effect on May 1st.

While I understand the changes' intent to improve services for individuals with I/DD, I strongly believe that the way these changes are being structured and implemented will cause significant harm to our system and the individuals served by it.

One of the most concerning aspects of the new policies is the division of current services into seven different service categories, each with its own set of requirements. These changes will severely limit the options available to clients in how and where they can receive services. Currently, clients have access to various valuable activities, including work training, vocational opportunities, life skills development, and community engagement under one service definition. These services are available to clients as they choose throughout their entire day. Under the new structure, however, many of these opportunities, especially work training and income-generating options, will no longer be available, replaced by community-based activities that may not align with the needs or interests of many individuals.

The limitations of the seven service definitions will make it much harder for clients to participate in a well-rounded, personalized program. Clients who prefer more specialized support or do not wish to participate in a community activity on a given day will have no recourse for receiving services at home or in other familiar settings. Without medical exceptions, many of these individuals will be left without options and, in many cases, without the social connections they currently have with peers at training centers. In addition, participation in many community opportunities requires a payment of some kind that many of our clients cannot afford on their restricted income.

The issues are compounded by the critical staffing shortages that are already a widespread problem in I/DD services across the country. As it stands, the shift from supporting groups of clients in training centers to providing one-on-one services in homes will place an enormous strain on the already overstretched workforce. Hiring more employees will be required to meet these new requirements, but funding for these expanded services does not appear to be allocated, leaving agencies like ours to either reduce the quality of care or face further difficulties recruiting and retaining staff.

If these changes go into effect without further consideration, the support network that many of our clients rely on will be even more underfunded and overworked, leading to a breakdown in service delivery. Moreover, the reduction in community service options and the absence of flexible programming will significantly diminish clients' quality of life and their opportunities for personal growth and independence.

These changes are being implemented with other major changes in I/DD supports. So many changes too fast will be a shock to the service system. Individuals with I/DD, service providers, and family members need to be actively involved in redesigning the system for improvements to ensure they meet their intended goal without harming the individuals these changes are intended to support. KDADS has yet to explain how these changes are going to improve the lives of individuals with I/DD the way they are currently designed and how these changes promote choice and independence for this population.

I urge you to consider the serious consequences of these proposed changes on our citizens with I/DD, their families, and the service providers committed to meeting their needs. I ask that you work with KDADS to revisit the planned overhaul of day services, with a focus on maintaining a variety of service options that allow for flexibility, choice, and individualized support with adequate involvement from providers, families, and persons served in the decision-making process before these changes happen to them. I implore you to advocate for KDADS to slow down, involve the individuals affected by these changes, and develop system changes that will protect these critical services and supports for a sustainable future of inclusion, independence, and choice for our citizens with I/DD.

Contact Information:

Liz Holle, Deputy Operations Officer
Big Lakes Developmental Center, Inc.
1416 Hayes Drive
Manhattan, KS 66502
785-776-2673 (Direct Line)
lholle@biglakes.org