

Executive Office

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April 14, 2011

Dear Friends, Families and Colleagues,

The guiding principle of The Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is to Put People First – it is the basis for all we do in support of our mission to help people with developmental disabilities live richer lives.

Health and safety must be our first priority. As you know, OPWDD has already begun implementing and requiring operational changes that are intended to improve care within our State-operated and voluntary provider service systems. Changes in policies pertaining to recruitment, hiring, retention, training, reporting, and discipline are all intended to help our workforce achieve better outcomes and minimize adverse occurrences. Quality, however, cannot be assured only by doing things right; it is fundamentally important that we do the right things. Today, we continue to provide services within the framework of a program design established over three decades ago in response to an urgent need to create community alternatives to the State's developmental centers. That program design has enabled tremendous progress, but, today, our goal must be to create a high-quality and sustainable service system for future generations. It is not sufficient to enable people with disabilities to live in communities; we need to enhance opportunities for them to be valued members of those communities.

To that end, we have decided to seek significant programmatic and fiscal improvements to our service system through the development of a new 1115 demonstration waiver, called the "People First Waiver." New York's People First Waiver will provide an opportunity for the State to infuse the principles of quality, choice and community into the very heart of a redesigned service system for people with developmental disabilities and their families. We propose that it be based on the following principles:

- financial support should be directed at individuals, not programs or institutions;
- services should be provided as part of a comprehensive plan that assures an individual's well-being and includes specific goals;
- all services provided to individuals, including those funded outside of the waiver, should be coordinated;
- individual rights, including the right to live in the least-restrictive environment possible, and opportunities for choice must be safeguarded; and
- the needs of families must be respected and supported.

In summary, the People First Waiver will ensure sustainable services for individuals and families that provide greater personal choice and control, improve coordination of cross-systems care, and expand community-based service options for more individuals. This will be achieved with the support of redesigned, cost-effective fiscal models that are transparent, streamlined, predictable and equitable.

We have recently initiated discussions with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding the goals and proposed program elements of this waiver and have received positive feedback on our initial concepts. This [concept paper](#) is but the first step in what will be a collaborative effort that will result in the formal submission of the People First Waiver application. This collaboration will fully engage all of our stakeholders and provide everyone with many opportunities to have their voices heard as we develop the People First Waiver application.

We are currently developing a People First Waiver Web page that will be the informational hub for this process, allowing all stakeholders to stay informed on Waiver progress. In the coming weeks, OPWDD will be meeting with individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to listen and gather their important input on the needs of this system. Later in May, OPWDD will hold its first public forums on the People First Waiver and launch online opportunities to provide input.

This is a major undertaking, but one which we firmly believe is foundational to developing a high quality system that meets the needs of individuals and families, is fully accountable, transparent and of the highest integrity. Your involvement is a key component to that success, and I want to ask each of you to join with us so that all voices are heard.

I am looking forward to partnering with you as we move forward with the People First Waiver application and the reform and improvements that will result on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities in New York State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Courtney Burke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Courtney Burke
Commissioner