

Action DD Lobbyist Reports on Special Session

Action DD

Olympia, April 27 -- The not-so-short 2010 Legislative Session did not lack for the drama that we have come to expect. And once again the quality of our grassroots effort was remarkable! Everyone that spent time in Olympia or participated in e-messaging legislators or took the time to call the hotline or visited their legislators in their district or provided moral or technical support for our mission, can give yourselves a collective “pat on the back” for a job well done. What a team! Once again the mission was accomplished in the face of extraordinary odds.

Beginning with the Governor’s Supplemental Budget request that directed the closure of the Francis Haddon Morgan Center and the Rainier School, throughout all the Senate and House versions of that budget, along with the submission of numerous policy bills that would have adverse affects on all RHCs, our team of parents, siblings, guardians, and caregivers were unrelenting. And all the hard work paid off when the final budget passed nearly 30 days after the end of the 60 regular sessions with no closures of any kind mandated!

Despite a nearly \$3 billion revenue shortfall, the governor, by her own staff’s admission, proposed a closure plan that would have cost the state nearly \$8 million over the next five years. This, being done without an adequate plan to provide necessary services to those that need services the most. But in the end, the House’s position not to close any facilities prevailed in negotiations with the Senate. Thanks to our ever growing list of legislative supporters that recognize that RHCs are part of the continuum of care for people with developmental disabilities, and believe that services should be improved and expanded and not eliminated.

One of our key missions over the course of the last few years has been to identify legislative friends and leaders that will stand up to the issue and advocate for the care that is provided in an RHC setting. We owe our longtime and new friends a big THANK YOU for once again making sure that sound reasoning prevailed over knee jerk reaction. Heading the list are familiar names; House Speaker Frank Chopp and Representatives Maralyn Chase, Norm Johnson, Charles Ross, Joe Schmick, Jamie Pedersen and Senators Ed Murray, Mark Schoesler, Curtis King, and Jim Honeyford. New heroes that rose to the top of the list were Representatives Sherry Appleton, Christine Rolfes, Chris Hurst, and Senator Pam Roach. The list is much longer and someone would be missed if we tried to name them all.

Now we need to look to the future. This is an election year and ALL 98 House of Representatives seats and half of the Senate is up for election. This gives us many opportunities to make more new friends, and support our tried and true delegation. The interim is always the best time to visit your legislators and tell them about the care your loved ones receive at the RHCs. Our legislative friends can only help them if they get re-elected, and it takes a lot of resources to run a campaign. Monetary donations are very much appreciated but it does take more than money to run a campaign. Donations of time, placement of signs, making telephone calls to your friends and neighbors are all appreciated and remembered. Notables that will

not be returning to the legislature include Representatives Dan Roach, Deb Wallace, Al O'Brien, Dennis Flannigan, and long time friend Brendan Williams. Long time RHC adversary Senator Darlene Fairley will be retiring and our House hero Maralyn Chase will be competing for that seat!

A couple of other processes will be taking place this interim; the Supplemental Budget included a DD study. "Not another STUDY!" you say. This one will be different; it was directed by Speaker Chopp who is frustrated that all the RHC talk surrounds "buildings". This study examines the needs of "people" and the availability of quality care. This is not a study to fear. If our message regarding the continuum of care, the cost comparisons being equal for those with the highest need, that crisis and respite care facilities are essential, our position will be reinforced.

Another process that is in the development state is a performance audit of the Department of Social and Health Services Developmental Disabilities Division. This audit will examine how DDD conducts their business, and if and how expected services are delivered. This one should be interesting.

Long time Chief of Staff for Speaker Chopp, Majken Ryherd, has announced that she is leaving her post to explore other endeavors. Majken has been our conduit to the Speaker for many years and will be sorely missed. But we wish her well in all of her future ventures.

Hopefully the success realized over the course of the last two Legislative sessions, the study of DD people needs, and the Performance Audit of DDD marks a recognition that our message is being heard. Perhaps we can convince more leaders and policy makers that discussing issues in the interim and learning about the impacts of their potential actions before bills and budget cuts are introduced, is a more effective way of managing long term programs.