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**Department of Developmental Services Releases Report on National Expert Panel's Review of DDS Conservatorship Process**

Following a comprehensive review of the California Department of Developmental Services' (DDS) conservatorship program, a national panel of experts concluded that it is appropriate for the department to continue its limited role in conservatorships along with the implementation of recommended improvements to the conservatorship process and consideration of alternatives to conservatorship.

"This panel of experts has given us a roadmap that will greatly assist our efforts to continually improve how we deliver services to help individuals live the fullest and least-restricted lives possible," said **Nancy Bargmann, DDS Director**. "We are extremely grateful for this partnership with recognized experts, and we look forward to working with our stakeholders as we implement the recommendations."

DDS convened the national panel in August 2022 in partnership with the [National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services](#) (NASDDDS). The panel included experts in health care, advocacy for individuals with disabilities, law, equity and inclusion, and conservatorships.

The panel was charged with undertaking a comprehensive review of all aspects of DDS' role in conservatorships, and with identifying ways for DDS to improve its oversight and ensure all those in DDS conservatorships are protected and supported as fully as possible.

"Under the leadership of the Department of Developmental Services, the state went beyond merely seeking input on the immediate questions brought forward related to this process," said **Mary Sowers, executive director of the NASDDDS**. "But it also proactively requested long-term strategies to improve the State's approach, promising to maximize the autonomy and choice of Californians with disabilities for decades to come."

The panel noted that DDS is conservator to slightly more than 400 individuals in California, and that the number of these cases has decreased by more than 100 in less than a decade. DDS seeks a conservatorship only when there is credible evidence that a conservatorship is necessary to protect the consumer's health, safety, or well-being. If there is a less restrictive way to meet the needs of a consumer, or if there are others

who can provide the care and protection needed, DDS does not seek a conservatorship.

The panel's report recommends that DDS:

- Develop a uniform, state-wide approach to providing information and training about conservatorships and alternatives to conservatorship.
- Develop written guidelines for how it arrives at its initial determination that a conservatorship is appropriate and for an annual conservatorship review.
- Provide additional support to conservatees by arranging for an independent advocate to meet with each DDS conservatee.
- Develop written standard conservatorship guidelines for use by all 21 regional centers.
- Provide annual training to regional centers about conservatorships and alternatives to conservatorships.
- Continue and expand current monitoring of all conservatees including automatic notification of licensing violations.
- Enhance data systems to monitor and analyze conservatorship trends.
- Develop system improvements for individuals who are not conserved by DDS, with a focus on the significant increase in transition-aged youth who are conserved.

These recommendations build on improvements DDS initiated in August 2022, including enhanced reviews of each conservatee, increasing reporting requirements for regional centers, and a person-centered, comprehensive assessment for each individual conserved by DDS.

“The report identifies best practices for incorporating person-centered approaches and supported decision making into DDS’ conservatorship review processes,” said **Catherine Blakemore, facilitator for the expert panel**, “For those with non-Department of Developmental Services’ conservatorships, the recommendations outline ways to provide families, educators and other professionals with information about alternatives to conservatorship, and ways multiple agencies can work together to increase the use of conservatorship alternatives.”

The full report can be viewed [here](#).

**About DDS:** *Under the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, DDS is responsible for overseeing the coordination & delivery of services and supports to approximately 400,000 Californians with, or at risk for, developmental disabilities including cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, autism, epilepsy and related conditions. The state’s service system is designed to meet the needs and choices of individuals at each stage of their lives, and, to the extent possible, support them in their home communities, providing choices that are reflective of lifestyle, cultural and linguistic preferences.*