

Remarks by Dr. Bruce Goldberg
Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month
March 5, 2008

Thank you, Bill for that warm introduction. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to be with you today and to see so many supporters of individuals with developmental disabilities among us at this important annual event. Your ongoing effort to bring awareness to the situation of this group continues to make a significant difference in the lives of so many of those individuals who are identified as one of our most vulnerable populations.

This year's theme of "Look...Listen...Report!" highlights the need to make protection from abuse and neglect one of our highest priorities. I am here with you today to assure you that no single agenda is more important for the Department of Human Services than combating abuse against vulnerable populations.

DHS must seek every possible strategy to prevent abuse, to mitigate the impact of abuse on our clients, and to keep known abusers from future work with our most vulnerable clients.

As you know, helping people with developmental disabilities is a major part of our work at DHS. Adults and children with developmental disabilities receive a wide range services all geared to help meet the individual and family needs and to provide necessary support.

Because we have such extensive responsibilities for this population, DHS has been especially sensitive to the issue of abuse of these individuals, and we have done a great deal to combat such abuse:

- We have one of the most expansive definitions of abuse in the country.
- We have a strong mandatory abuse reporting system, and we have trained extensively to reinforce the legal and moral duty to report abuse. As a result, over the past seven years we have investigated more than 11,536 allegations of abuse and substantiated 5,159 of these cases, or 44.7 percent. Although abuse is never justified, in this context, a large number is good because it means people are aware of abuse; they're reporting abuse; we're investigating abuse; and we're substantiating abuse.
- We have instituted across-the-board, person-centered planning for all our clients. This planning includes state-of-the-art and nationally

recognized practices for keeping medically fragile and behaviorally challenged clients safe from harm.

- We are one of a handful of states that serves nearly all persons with developmental disabilities in small community-based settings.
- Together with all of you in the advocacy community, we have worked to improve the workforce and make it more professional. Last session the Legislature allocated 20 million dollars that will combine with federal funds to roll out 50 million dollars to direct care staff serving our clients. That's an increase of nearly 12 percent in wages and benefits!

But we cannot be satisfied with what we have accomplished so far. We have much, much, much more to do, including:

We will be working with legislators such as Rep. Gelsler to bring back key elements of HB 3617.

- Implementing an abuse registry across all DHS-served populations that will screen potential workers for past abuses in addition to criminal histories. We hope to roll this out within a year.
- Developing consumer friendly Web sites where information about provider compliance and complaint histories can be easily obtained.

We will go live in a matter of months with a web application to make easily available information about complaints and allegations at facilities.

- Working with law enforcement to better prosecute abuse cases that should be elevated to criminal charges and convictions.

I commend all of you for the work you are doing and the dedication you have shown to these clients, to the programs we provide, and to the department. I promise you that we will move forward together with renewed vigor and an ongoing commitment to righting the wrongs that have been done to our vulnerable clients and to ensure that their futures will continue to improve under our care.