



Consumer Advisory Council Meeting

February 4, 2026

10:00am – 12:00pm

In Attendance:

Emily Ball

Julie Ball

Scott Brown

Mary Beth Bruder

Karen Carney

Molly Cole

Tom Cosker

Walt Glomb

Kim Mearman

Deborah Richards

Cristina Wilson

UCEDD Faculty/Staff in Attendance:

Bethanne Vergean

Jill Isenberg

Tu Anh Nguyen

Andrea Brinnel

Christine Jozef

Vaishnavi Shahane

Ross Mortensen

Summary

Disability Advocacy and Budget Updates

The meeting began with introductions from various participants, including members of the Consumer Advisory Council and representatives from different organizations involved in disability advocacy and education. Mary Beth provided updates on budgetary concerns, mentioning potential funding for the UCEDD and LEND programs, and noted that the Department of Education had allocated additional funds, though the future of these allocations remains uncertain. The agenda for the meeting included updates on various projects, with presenters set to discuss their work, including interactive and asynchronous approaches to training, early childhood initiatives, and collaborations with Special Olympics. The meeting aimed to boost morale in light of recent budgetary challenges, and participants expressed enthusiasm about ongoing projects and future collaborations.

Federal Funding and DD Council Updates

Mary Beth provided updates on federal funding challenges, noting that while the House budget maintained support for UCEDDs and LEND programs, concerns remain about potential cuts to Department of Education grants. Walt reported that the DD Council is operating on continuing resolutions with flat funding, and is in the process of drafting its next five-year plan with three main goals: addressing access to specialized services, promoting self-advocacy, and focusing on community inclusion culture change. Tom discussed ongoing projects including abuse and neglect work, healthcare issues, special education, employment initiatives, and the upcoming release of a report on out-of-state school placements, which revealed that 224 students are currently placed across 15 states.

Disability Rights 3-Year Plan Update

Molly provided an update on their 3-year plan, which is in its second year and focuses on enhancing community living for people with disabilities. They are conducting needs assessments and surveys, with public input scheduled for the next phase. The organization is working on various initiatives, including emergency preparedness training and connecting people with community events. Molly also discussed their efforts in addressing independent living policies, including a pending bill on supported decision-making and an upcoming Candidates Forum on October 7th. The organization has secured funding through September 2026 and is close to raising the necessary funds for the Candidates Forum, which will feature candidates from various offices and be broadcast in multiple languages.

Disability Advocacy and Policy Updates

The group discussed the importance of supporting candidates who prioritize disability issues, highlighting the need for congressional support due to potential federal cuts. They emphasized the significance of the 50th anniversary of IDEA and the importance of state-level advocacy to protect disability rights. Kim announced an upcoming survey on autism spectrum needs, and AnnSmith stressed the importance of voting and collaboration across disability communities. The conversation ended with updates on various projects funded by UCEDD grants, including training, demonstration, and evaluation efforts, with a focus on equity in early intervention services.

UConn Early Childhood Intervention Programs

Mary Beth presented an overview of various early childhood intervention programs at UConn, including ECIPC, LEND, and public health certificate initiatives. She highlighted key outcomes from the first year of the ECIPC project, such as revised higher education curricula and

increased diversity in the workforce. Mary Beth also described the LEND program's structure, requirements, and impact on trainees' professional development. The presentation concluded with a brief mention of the Early Intervention Specialist Program, which has been running since 1988.

Early Childhood Program Development Grant

Bethanne discussed a 5-year OSEP-funded grant project to update early childhood program syllabi and master course outlines at Connecticut community colleges, which merged into a single state college system during the project. The team worked with 12 community colleges to update 5 core courses and conducted listening sessions with faculty to ensure content aligned with OSEP priority areas, DEC recommended practices, and Connecticut core competencies. Bethanne also presented a separate Connecticut Family Stars project, which aimed to develop and evaluate a system for tracking, monitoring, and enrolling young infants and toddlers in appropriate early childhood programs through parent-to-parent outreach, using Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3 and the Sparkler app. The project, which began in Hartford and was replicated in Northwest and Waterbury, is now in its final phase, focusing on sustainability planning for the remaining 6 months of funding.

Connecticut Early Childhood Data Integration

Mary Beth and Bethanne discussed the data systems in Connecticut for early childhood services, highlighting the lack of integration between systems and the resulting duplications and inefficiencies. They mentioned the work of consultant Janice Grindel in addressing these issues and the formation of a 359 task force to improve data coordination. Mary Beth also presented on the Aspiring Special Education Leaders program, led by Andrea, which focuses on developing leadership skills among aspiring educators, and the Connecticut Leadership Academy, which provides training for birth-to-5 leaders. Both programs have been successful in preparing leaders and improving educational outcomes in Connecticut.

Next Meeting:

The next CAC meeting will be scheduled in the Fall 2026.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Jozef
Administrative Officer
Connecticut UCEDD