

Pipeline ... Extra!

Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
Ted Strickland, Governor

John L. Martin, Director



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Open Letter from Director John Martin **Budget Conversations Spur Action**



Thank you for helping us to sharpen our pencils and strengthen our resolve to make the most of scarce financial resources.

Hello Pipeline readers and thank you for taking a moment to read this letter, detailing the results of the January Budget Conversations throughout the state:

In 2008, the nation's economic situation became abundantly clear – rough times were ahead. In the next two years, we will confront the most serious erosion in revenues in five decades, reflecting the realities of an economic downturn that will affect every state agency, including the ODMRDD.

State governments, unlike the federal government, cannot operate on a deficit. Ohio's Governor must balance the budget. Because less state tax revenue is being collected, difficult choices, including reductions in spending, must be made.

In January 2008, Governor Strickland addressed the economic situation and ordered the first of three budget adjustments. For ODMRDD, the first of the three cuts (\$17.2 million) resulted in a reduction to its Central Office administration and Developmental Center costs. Central Office staff was reduced by nearly 16 percent. In the ten Developmental Centers, staff was reduced by 286 positions. We also reduced overall census at Developmental Centers by 132 residents.

In September 2008, national economic indicators plummeted. Governor Strickland ordered a further reduction in ODMRDD's budget by \$16.9 million. Savings of this magnitude could not be absorbed by Central Office. The Department looked to the

community to make necessary adjustments, and reduced Family Support Services and County Board Subsidy line items to make the necessary reductions. It was important to us all to assure that these reductions did not adversely affect the health and safety of residents at the Developmental Centers. In addition, the Governor ordered that Medicaid-funded services were to be held harmless.

Only two months later, in December 2008, in the face of an unprecedented economic environment, the Governor acted once again to ensure a balanced budget for the fiscal year by reducing ODMRDD's annual budget by an additional \$19.1 million. Overall, within 11 months, \$53.1 million had been removed from the ODMRDD budget.

Following the Governor's third budget announcement, ODMRDD convened a group of stakeholders, including leadership of MRDD system partners. We discussed the seriousness of the situation before us. This group suggested that I work with a few stakeholder organizations to conduct a series of community forums across Ohio to discuss the budget, and ask two essential questions. My goal was to listen.

More than 500 individuals, families, and service providers participated and offered ways to make the most of what we have, protect what is most important, and suggest ways we might do things differently. At each of the five forums, I provided an overview of the budget situation, a brief history of the how the eroding national economy has affected the Department and the State of Ohio, and asked participants two questions:

1. What are you most concerned about regarding the budget, that is, what aspects of the MRDD system do you think are most vulnerable/fragile?
2. What are your suggestions for how ODMRDD and the entire MRDD system can save money and be more efficient?

We did the same thing at each of the ten Developmental Centers, and I met with all ODMRDD Central Office staff. I asked the same questions. We also knew that not everybody would be able to participate in person, so we created a virtual forum at our website, so everyone could be heard.

Despite the sobering subject matter, I truly enjoyed this opportunity to have an honest conversation regarding all aspects of our system. I came away from this process both impressed and energized by the thoughtful and constructive dialogue. In each corner of the state, the concerns were similar. And, in most instances, the feedback provided reinforcement for the work of the MRDD Futures Committee.

A majority of participants were concerned about:

- What will happen at Developmental Centers;
- The dilemma of aging caregivers;
- The need for well-trained and qualified direct care workers; and
- The need to provide better supports to family care givers, especially those with young children.

Suggestions that were made time and again included:

- Sharing resources among state agencies, county boards, providers, and families;
- Seeking regulatory relief cutting through the red tape that hinders creativity in

providing services;

- Examination of shared services and use of technology to provide more flexible options that could save dollars in the long run; and,
- Making it a priority to invest in people living at home with families.

Collectively, these comments -- along with the guidance of the MRDD Futures Committee -- validate our direction and strengthen our resolve to act upon what we have learned.

So what's next? During the past two years, we have listened and learned what we need to do to achieve the Department's Five Goals:

- Less complex service delivery with fair and logical payment systems;
- Good stewardship of limited resources;
- Quality outcomes, through a combination of people and processes;
- Service delivery models designed in response to choices made by people served; in alliance with community services; and
- A system-wide vision developed with stakeholders.

We have already taken steps, with these goals in mind, to improve our system. I encourage you to read what people have contributed (*see attached PDF*). I think you will agree that it is time to make the parts of our system work better together for individuals and families, the people serving them, and the community as a whole.

I am grateful for the dedicated members of our community who helped to make my travels around the state fruitful – your voices resonate as we move confidently forward. Together, we will successfully navigate the rough patches ahead, and achieve our mission to provide opportunities for the continuous improvement of the quality of life for Ohio's citizens with developmental disabilities and their families.



Pipeline Extra feedback ... direct from you to the state ...

Questions? Comments? Pipeline Extra is a publication of the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (ODMRDD) and is distributed infrequently, to highlight breaking news in the MRDD arena. The regular Pipeline publication publishes twice monthly to inform readership of relevant information affecting MRDD stakeholders. Please share your questions or comments with us at feedback@odmrdd.state.oh.us or contact Sherry Steinman at sherry.steinman@dmr.state.oh.us, phone (614) 644-0262.

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