

PRESS RELEASE

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Self-Directed Advocacy Network of Maryland, Inc. (SDAN)

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MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL-DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS TO DEMAND THAT MDH-DDA HALT HARMFUL, DRASTIC POLICY CHANGES MADE WITHOUT STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The Self-Directed Advocacy Network of Maryland, Inc. (SDAN) urges the Moore Administration to roll back the implementation of unrestrained new policies and procedures announced on October 24, 2024, by the Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Administration (MDH-DDA). SDAN also respectfully asks the Maryland General Assembly to support a legislative hearing, or legislative or mediated workgroup with stakeholders, to study the issues.

Annapolis, MD— SDAN, the state’s only developmental disability rights organization dedicated to participant choice and control of Medicaid waiver services, will rally at **Lawyers Mall in Annapolis on Tuesday, November 19th**, to protest recent, wholesale action by the MDH-DDA which significantly restricts access to services and the rights of individuals who have chosen to ‘self-direct’ their Medicaid home-and-community-based services. **SDAN’s message is “HEAR US, DON’T HARM US!”**

SDAN’s years-long collaboration with decision-makers ended abruptly in January 2024, when DDA Deputy Secretary Hutchinson was appointed by MDH Secretary Herrera-Scott. In the ensuing months, thousands of individuals who “self-direct” their DDA services reported mounting denials and puzzling new obstacles to accessing approved services.

Despite repeated denials that changes were afoot, the MDH-DDA’s sudden rollout of a dense 116-page ‘Self-Direction Manual’—and concurrent replacement of all online forms and guidance—has clearly established what waiver participants have reported for months—surreptitious policy and procedural changes, bringing about harsh reductions and denials of existing services; unprecedented difficulties in hiring and compensating vital support staff; and widespread non-payments to vendors and other service providers, among other concerns.

While the MDH-DDA claims that most of its new policies and procedures—set to steeply increase red tape in an already stressed and chaotic system—are federally required, its new policies are clearly intended to throttle the approval of individual supports and services long before any Medicaid funds could ever be disbursed. Their actions are best characterized as **austerity-driven measures creating disparities in DDA waiver services.**

In doing so, MDH-DDA is failing to meet the assessed needs of, and uphold the rights of, this small group of DDA waiver participants. Its avoidance of meaningful stakeholder input demonstrates a lack of concern for the negative impact on our state’s most vulnerable residents. The entire Self-Direction service delivery system, from participants, their families, service providers, case workers, to fiscal management companies and beyond—has been blindsided and overwhelmed by the actions of MDH-DDA and the brief period allowed for training and compliance.

“We cannot allow participant choice and control, the hallmarks of Self-Direction, to be threatened by MDH-DDA’s total disregard for the basic supports and services that keep so many Marylanders with disabilities thriving in their communities,” said an SDAN spokesperson. “We are going to Annapolis to once again hold this administration accountable to the rights of people with developmental disabilities.”

While advocacy efforts have had some success, these impactful measures remain scheduled for implementation on November 21st. Therefore, **on November 19th, advocates will make it clear to Governor Moore and Maryland legislators exactly how MDH-DDA’s decision to effect an extreme overhaul of Self-Direction is threatening to the everyday lives of Marylanders with developmental disabilities.**

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