

Hello. I understand that Chief of Staff, Corey Johns, is looking for testimony in relation to the bills that address issues at DDA. I am the parent and guardian of a 38 year old woman who has been in self-direction for 17 years since she aged out of school at 21. The Montgomery County transitioning youth specialist told me that self-direction was the best fit, as my daughter was a risk of being rejected for group home placement due to her behavioral issues that included agitation and aggression. At that time the "new directions" waiver as self-direction was called at the time was flexible, reasonable, and person-centered. I became the support broker and created a home-based program that was tailored to my daughter's needs and interests. It evolved as we learned what worked and what didn't. Instead of our government taking over the expense of my daughter's housing, utilities, food, and other expenses that would have been addressed if she had enrolled in traditional agency, I covered those from my personal funds. I bought a 3-row minivan for Valerie's community outings. This is because she can become agitated in the vehicle and needs to wear a school-bus style harness that clips at the shoulders and hips to keep her from reaching the driver. She takes off a normal seatbelt. Valerie's direct support providers don't have vehicles with thirds row. The behavioral issues make it impossible to rely on public transportation. So, from the beginning DDA understood that I give the staff a credit card to use when the vehicle needs fuel and I maintain the vehicle, so we have received reimbursement for mileage because the vehicle and expenses are ours even though we don't do the driving. DDA has approved this for 17 years. Two months ago the FMS, Fello, sent out an email that time sheets for staff that receive reimbursement much match the mileage reimbursement requests. Although I am an employee for my daughter, it is only as a backup and I am never the one driving or on duty during the time of her outings. This new policy that was never announced in advance to my knowledge is too restrictive to make sense for my daughter and our situation. We can't be the only ones affected by the sudden and unnecessary change. It feels that DDA constantly changes the rules without input, and always with the insinuation that Self-Directed participants and their families can not be trusted not to commit fraud. It is insulting. The new policy did not come with any guidelines as to how these time sheets would be submitted since staff use EVVIE to log times in and out for payroll and not all staff have a printer at home to print screen shots of their shifts and scan them to attach them even if they were using their own vehicles. This is typical of the poor planning and communication from DDA and the FMS services. DDA has also tried to impose restrictions on the reimbursement of health insurances premiums for employees that they did not get any input on or notify participants of. One of my employees has been trying to get her premiums reimbursed since November of 2025 without success and dropped her health insurance last month because she can't afford to continue to pay out of pocket. This is in spite of a staff handbook that says employees can be reimbursed for their health insurance if they provide an invoice and proof of payment and the fact that there is money in Valerie's DDA budget for this purpose. DDA requires that participants have a staff handbook. When we hire employees and tell them that they will receive benefits

and then don't provide them we are at risk of a lawsuit from employees. Our support broker has spent many hours trying to help this employee by assisting her with gathering all the documentation DDA requires, writing emails to DDA and the FMS which are all billable to the participants. DDA is now saying that vision and dental coverage are not eligible for reimbursement. That does not appear in the self-direction manual. It does not appear in the employee handbook that I have given employees for years. My employees' insurance is with Kaiser Permanente and they include vision coverage as a bonus so there is no separate charge for it. They claim that they can't reimburse the insurance because of the vision coverage included. My employee is due reimbursement for the past 11 months but has not received a penny because DDA changed their rules without informing her or me of the change, after it was too late to change her policy. I explained to DDA that her insurance broker told her it would be \$100 more per month to get a policy without the vision coverage. It has been more than 3 months, and I received no answer from DDA as to what they would do to address the problem. Valerie's support broker communicated to DDA that she has other clients with the same problem, but they do not respond to her with any answer either. Now the FMS is requiring a copy of the staff handbook, a copy of the health insurance plan description, copies of bank statements or credit card statements that show payment made by the employee, in addition to the invoices. It is a lot more documentation than ever before. Now the latest change is that, not only do the employees have to pay the premium up front and wait forever to be repaid, but they won't process the reimbursement request until the month paid for is over. These are not high paying jobs. Many employees I have had over the years went without health insurance because they couldn't come up with the first month's premium to enroll. Now, on top of that DDA wants to slash employee wages. Many of the women who care for my daughter have a second job to make ends meet. They are already struggling financially. It is one of the reasons I don't want my daughter to ride in their vehicles even if they did have a third row, because they don't always have enough money to replace worn tires and properly maintain their personal vehicles. It would be foolish for the state to reduce their wages. The state would not only disrupt care for participants by doing so, but these employees would have to apply to the state for housing vouchers and food assistance, costing the state money to make up for the lost wages, not to mention that they would be eligible to file for unemployment to make up for the lost wages.

Last year DDA implemented new requirements for vendors. They provided inadequate notice to participants and vendors. The Vendors were unable to work with participants for pay until they provided the new documentations, which had not been previously required even if the vendor had already been working with participants for years. The result was that services were interrupted for months while vendors worked to provide all the new documents they were required to provide. It interrupted income for the vendors and interrupted services for the

participants. DDA does not consider the consequences of their frequent and abrupt changes. The change went into effect January 1, making it difficult to get help from anyone since offices closed for holidays and many people were on vacation.

The same thing happened the year before that, when Electronic Visit Verification was scheduled to go into effect on January 1 without making sure that the FMS's were ready and that participants and support staff had adequate training. There were no pay codes for employees to use in the EVVIE system when employees were required to begin using the system. Payroll was messed up for months because of the poor implementation, family and employees were all stressed out. There could not be a worse time to put major changes into effect than the first of the year because it is so difficult to reach anyone for help, and because everyone is already so busy due to the holiday season. As participants, we never get any say in these implementation dates

Ever since Marlana Hutchison has been the deputy secretary of DDA I have found the agency to have a hostile position to self-direction. They create so many hoops for participants to jump through that it is clear that they want participants to give up and change to traditional agency services.

While I am sure that there is some fraud and abuse of the system in self-direction as you would find in any group of people, it is unfair to participants and their families to view all of us through the lens and make our lives more difficult and frustrating. I make personal and financial sacrifices to keep my daughter at home because her behavior and limited ability to communicate make her vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Her health, safety and quality of life would be diminished with institutional care. Please help my daughter and other participants by protecting the integrity of self-directed services.

Sincerely,

Sheree Thoburn

parent/guardian of Valerie Nameth

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