



## Department of Aging and Disability Services

### *At a Glance*

**Amy L. Porter, Commissioner**

**Established: 2011**

**Statutory Authority: Public Act 11-44, 18-169**

**Central Office: 55 Farmington Avenue, Hartford CT 06105**

**Web address: <https://portal.ct.gov/ADS>**

**Total employees: 413**

**Total expenditures: \$110,605,592 with approximately 73% federal and 27% state funding.**

### **Mission**

*Maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.*

### **Statutory Responsibility**

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) provides a wide range of services to individuals with disabilities and older adults who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities, older adults, and in our employment-based programs we also have businesses/employers as a dual customer.

Legislative authority resides in several different sections of the state statutes owing to the merged history of the agency. They appear in the following sections:

- CGS Secs. 17b -650 to 17b-666, 17b-607 and 17b-612 to 615 - ADS agency statutes and program statutes for the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS);
- CGS Secs. 10-293 to 10-311a – program statutes for the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB);



- CGS Sect 17b-650a – Data reporting requirements for BRS and BESB Vocational Rehabilitation Programs. The Vocational Rehabilitation Programs of the agency have been successfully incorporated into the Unified State Plan under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and performance measures as required by the federal government were included in this plan.
- CGS Secs. 46a-27 to 46a-33b – statutes for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing program;
- CGS Sec. 14-11b - statute for the Driver Training program;
- CGS Sec. 31-283 - statute for the Workers’ Rehabilitation Services program;
- CGS Secs. 17a-302 to 17a-316a, 17b-251, 17b-349e and 7-127b - statutes for the State Unit on Aging (SUA); and
- CGS Secs. 17a-405 to 422 statutes for the State Ombudsman program.

Aging and Disability Services’ Administration encompasses the Commissioner’s Office, as well as the functional areas of legal, legislative, strategic planning, public information/communications, operational readiness, fiscal, facilities and asset management, and payroll. Human Resources, Equal Employment Opportunity and Information Technology services are provided in partnership with the Department of Administrative Services. The department has four programmatic bureaus, including:

- Bureau of Aging Services;
- Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS);
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB); and
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS).



Our programs, policies and practices are designed to:

- Deliver integrated aging and disability services responsive to the needs of Connecticut citizens;
- Provide leadership on aging and disability issues statewide;
- Provide and coordinate aging and disability programs and services in the areas of employment, education, independent living, accessibility and advocacy;
- Advocate for the rights of Connecticut residents with disabilities and older adults; and
- Serve as a resource on aging and disability issues at the state level.

### ***Core Values***

**INTEGRITY:** We interact honestly and fairly with all others, adhering to strong ethics, values and principles.

**RESPECT:** We value and recognize others for their unique skills, talents and contributions, and are considerate in all interactions.

**PROFESSIONALISM:** We are mindful of our daily conduct and strive to have the highest work standards with a courteous attitude.

**OPEN COMMUNICATION:** We encourage the sharing of information and knowledge in an accurate, honest and supportive way.

### **Public Service**

While each program has its own legislative requirements and program effectiveness standards, Aging and Disability Services as a whole focuses on continuous improvement. We continue to work toward building a full complement of metrics to share in this annual report, focusing on our mission of ***Maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.***



## *Major Programs and Highlights of SFY22:*

### **The Bureau of Aging Services**

The Bureau of Aging Services is administratively divided into two sections:

**The State Unit on Aging** administers federal Older Americans Act programs for supportive services, in-home services, and congregate and home-delivered meals. It also administers programs that provide senior community employment, health insurance counseling, and respite care for caregivers. Further, the unit provides oversight of and leadership for the Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut.

- **Elderly Nutrition Program:** The Elderly Nutrition Program serves nutritionally balanced home-delivered and congregate meals, provides other nutrition services and offers opportunities for socialization to individuals aged 60 and older and their spouses. The Elderly Nutrition Program is supported by State and Federal as well as local funds and voluntary client contributions. State and Federal funds are distributed to Connecticut's five Area Agencies on Aging who, in turn, contract with local Elderly Nutrition Projects for meals and nutrition services. In FFY21\*, over 2 million congregate and home-delivered meals were provided. \$ 2,977,850 was received in State funds for the Elderly Nutrition Program. Regular federal funding received for FFY21\* was \$11,190,629; Families First Coronavirus Response Act and CARES Act funding received through FFY21 was \$8,136,180.
- **Connecticut Statewide Respite Program:** In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging and the Connecticut Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, the Statewide Respite Care Program offers short-term respite care to provide relief to caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The program provides assessments, the development of care plans and provision of case management by Care Managers at the Area Agency on Aging, along with the purchase of necessary respite services. In SFY22, \$1,809,216 was received in state funds for this program, with 448 caregivers and 462 care recipients receiving respite services through this program. Care Managers provided 4,495 hours of case management to caregivers on behalf of care recipients.
- **National Family Caregiver Support Program:** In partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging, this program offers a range of services that enable caregivers to care for their loved ones. The major components of the program include information about available services, access to supportive services, support groups, caregiver training, respite care and



supplemental services. Priority consideration is given to those with the greatest social and economic need. During the pandemic, Executive Order No. 7NN provided additional support to caregivers by waiving the regulatory limitations on the amount of support that could be provided to caregivers under this program. In FFY21\*, \$2,127,682 in federal funds were received to implement these services. 145 outreach related activities were held, reaching 494,695 people. 1,468 caregivers, including 144 grandparents raising grandchildren, received 96,999 units of caregiver services.

- **CHOICES:** Connecticut’s program for Health insurance assistance, Outreach, Information and referral, Counseling and Eligibility Screening (CHOICES) is the department’s state health insurance assistance program. CHOICES provides objective counseling, outreach and training services in partnership with Connecticut’s five Area Agencies on Aging and the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc. In SFY22, 314 certified CHOICES team members spent 12,952 hours counseling Medicare beneficiaries in 22,258 counseling contacts. 13,971 beneficiaries received assistance with Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage Plan comparisons and enrollments, and 11,903 Medicare beneficiaries received eligibility screening, benefits explanation and/or applications assistance for the Medicare Savings Program, Medicaid and/or Extra Help/Low- Income Subsidy programs. CHOICES participated in 310 outreach events (some virtual, some in-person) providing Medicare-related education and information to 22,348 attendees. CHOICES conducted two New Team Member Training Sessions in SFY22. All trainings were held virtually due to COVID-19. 63 in-kind professionals and volunteers became certified CHOICES Team Members during this period. CHOICES received \$1,000,783 in state funding and \$700,643 in federal funding.
- **Connecticut Statewide Fall Prevention Initiative:** In SFY22, the CT Healthy Living Collective (CHLC) managed and coordinated facilitation of the Tai Ji Quan Moving for Better Balance (TJQMBB) program. The TJQMBB is an evidence-based Tai Chi program proven to reduce falls. Due to COVID-19, the majority of TJQMBB classes used a virtual platform. The CHLC worked with each Senior Center and the program instructors to ensure fidelity to the TJQMBB model and to brainstorm solutions that met each Center’s needs so that the program could be offered amidst the pandemic. From SFY21 to SFY22, the CHLC increased site participation by 58% from 10 sites to 17 sites. The TJQMBB program was supported through state funds in the amount of \$77,324 for a total of 363 participants.
- **Coalition for Elder Justice in Connecticut (CEJC):** The Coalition is a multidisciplinary statewide system of stakeholders partnering to better understand and develop strategies to



protect older Connecticut citizens from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Coalition continues to work toward advancing the rights of older adults and creating awareness to prevent elder abuse. The Coalition collaborates with public and private partners on elder abuse and elder rights issues. The Coalition continues to improve communications, foster new partnerships and maintain relationships with long-term partners through the Coalition’s website, a monthly newsletter, through social media, and the annual Elder Justice Symposium. Members of the Coalition have also partnered with one another on several occasions during the last fiscal year to share information and resources related to the rights of older adults and abuse prevention.

- **Collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General on the Elder Justice Hotline.** On July 19, 2021, the Office of the Attorney General announced the launch of the “Elder Justice Hotline” (1-860-808-5555) a designated help line for anyone seeking information or assistance related to issues affecting older adults. Coalition members representing numerous state agencies trained the staff of Attorney General’s Consumer Assistance Unit, the unit assigned to answer the hotline. For several weeks prior to the launch, agency representatives supplied information on services and supports available to the public through their respective agencies. They also prepared the Consumer Assistance Unit staff members to assist callers to connect with the appropriate state agency to address their question or concern when a matter cannot be otherwise addressed by the Office of the Attorney General. Members of the Coalition Steering Committee accompanied Attorney General William Tong and Assistant Attorney General Sandra Arenas to area senior centers and presented to professional organizations to promote the launch of the hotline and encourage membership in the Coalition.
- **Collaboration with the Connecticut Bar Association (CBA), Elder Law Section.** Members of the Coalition Steering Committee continued their collaborative efforts with the Elder Law Section of the CBA and the Office of the Probate Court Administrator to strengthen advocacy efforts provided to skilled nursing facility residents. During SFY22, the Coalition developed and presented 5 virtual educational “Lunch and Learn” sessions for attorneys, professional conservators, and social workers. These sessions reach over 400 professionals, educating them on legal issues related to nursing home rights, standards of practice for conservators, and providing free continuing education credits for attorneys and social workers.



- **Collaboration with New Partners.** The Coalition has partnered with several public and private organizations throughout the year, complementing our current membership. In April 2022, during National Victims of Crime Week, the Coalition partnered with the CT Council of Family Services Agency to raise awareness about the services and resources available to older adult victims of crime through the U.S. Department of Justice. In May 2022, members of the Coalition were asked to present at the CT Coalition to End Homelessness Annual Training Institute to provide much needed information to their membership to assist in the prevention of homelessness and to address the increase in older adults in CT facing homelessness. In June 2022, Coalition members participated in a Peer-to-Peer training program, also funded by the Department of Justice, with our partners at the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the Connecticut Police Academy to educate law enforcement officers on ageism and the resources available to assist them when working with older adults.
- **AARP and CECJ Sponsored “Fraud Fighting Fourth Fridays”:** Coalition Members continue to partner with AARP as presenters for AARP’s monthly virtual “Fraud Fighting Fourth Friday Series,” educating older adults on how to identify scams such as vacation scams, investments fraud and money mules.

**The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP)** provides individual advocacy to residents of skilled nursing facilities, residential care homes and assisted living facilities. The State Long Term Care Ombudsman also advocates for systemic changes in policy and legislation in order to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals who reside in those settings.

The LTCOP responds to and investigates complaints brought forward by residents, family members and/or other individuals acting on their behalf. All communication with the residents, their family members or legal guardians, as applicable, is held in strict confidentiality.

- **Resident Councils:** The Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils is an organization of residents of long-term care facilities who work to improve the quality of care and the services in their homes and affect positive change in larger systems such as state and federal governments. The Executive Board of Presidents of Resident Councils is formed to represent the interests of the Coalition and to develop legislative initiatives.



- **VOICES:** The VOICES forum is an annual event jointly convened by the LTCOP and the Statewide Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils. It is an opportunity for Presidents of Resident Councils from around the state to gather and discuss issues and concerns in their homes and to provide input into legislative proposals for the upcoming legislative session.
- **Resident Advocates:** Resident Advocates are volunteers that are trained by Ombudsman staff in residents' rights and problem solving. Resident Advocates are asked to spend four hours per week in one assigned nursing home and help residents solve problems or concerns.
- **Advocacy:** During FFY21\*, the Ombudsman's office responded to 4,487 complaints. The Ombudsman's office continues to work with residents and family members as we begin to recover from the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on our long-term care communities. The Ombudsman's office is still offering live question and answer sessions on Facebook, which are then posted on our website and YouTube channel. Technology resources have proven to be a resource that allows the office to keep residents and family members informed while also gaining an understanding of what is happening from their point of view. Other advocacy activities include participation in the Long-Term Care Advisory Council, Connecticut Elder Action Network, the Inclusive Communities workgroup, other stakeholder workgroups and serving as co-chair of the Coalition for Elder Justice in CT.

## **Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind**

The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is responsible for the coordination and provision of services to all Connecticut residents who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments.

BESB has four separate service programs which provide a full range of services to clients of all ages who are legally blind or have significant visual impairments:

- **The Adult Services Program** serves as the central intake for clients and provides independent living training to adults to assist them with maintaining independence within the home and the community. In FFY21\* 399 independent living services were provided to 124 Adult Blind clients (under age 55), and 1,972 independent living services were provided to 507 Older Blind clients (55 and over.) Twenty clients received DeafBlind Community Inclusion grant services.





- **The Children's Services Program** provides braille instruction, mobility instruction, adaptive technology devices and training, braille and large print textbooks, and independent living training to children, as well as professional development training and technical assistance to school districts. Over 920 children received services through the Children's Services Program, including preschool services, braille instruction, adaptive technology training, mobility training and expanded core curriculum training. There were 84 students who are blind or visually impaired that took part in BESB's in-person and virtual extra-curricular programs - including Skills for Life virtual travel training camp and Leap into Life in-person and virtual transition program.
- **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** provides school-to-work transition services to youth who are blind or have visual impairments and assists adults to obtain, retain and advance in employment. The program also provides technical assistance and job candidate referral services to employers across the state. During FFY21\*, 726 clients were served under BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these, 687 were served under an individualized employment plan and 60 clients achieved employment. The average hourly wages for these consumers were \$24.17.
- **The Business Enterprise Program** offers entrepreneurial opportunities to people who are blind to manage their own food service and gift store businesses at public facilities. During FFY21\*, gross program sales from the vending facilities exceeded \$2.34 million with gross profits surpassing \$1.28 million. There were 26 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 57 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$28,035.

BESB maintains a confidential registry of people who are blind in Connecticut and provides comprehensive independent living services, adaptive aids and devices and volunteer supports, among other rehabilitative services, to individuals of all ages who are legally blind, DeafBlind or visually impaired with a goal of maximizing independence and community inclusion.

Under Statutory requirements, the bureau provides any school district the services of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments to address the vision-related developmental needs of students who are blind, DeafBlind or visually impaired upon written request.



## **Bureau of Disability Determination Services**

The Bureau of Disability Determination Services is responsible for deciding medical eligibility for the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. These programs provide cash benefits and medical insurance to individuals who are unable to maintain employment due to the severity of their disabilities.

33,365 Social Security disability claims were adjudicated during SFY22.

Individuals with disabilities can apply for benefits or inquire about the status of their application by visiting <http://www.ssa.gov/>.

## **Bureau of Rehabilitation Services**

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) strives to create opportunities that enable individuals with significant disabilities to work competitively and live independently. Staff works to provide individualized services, develop effective partnerships, and share sufficient information so that consumers and their families may make informed choices about the rehabilitation process and employment options.

The Bureau hosts several programs:

- **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** is designed to help individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, maintain or advance in employment. In FFY21\*, 5,063 consumers were assisted in the BRS Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Of these 3,496 were served under an individualized employment plan and 829 achieved employment. Average hourly wages for those who achieved employment were \$26.20.
- **Level Up:** In addition to assisting adults, the Vocational Rehabilitation program also provides students with pre-employment services including tools, training and resources to develop their future potential to work competitively and forge a path to independence. Services include job exploration, counseling for post-secondary pursuits, work-based learning experiences, work-readiness training and self-advocacy. In FFY21\*, 2,172 students with disabilities were served in the Level Up program and 483 students were served in community work-based experiences.



- **The Workforce Outreach Team** (formerly Connect Ability Staffing) is a component of the Vocational Rehabilitation program dedicated to preparing and qualifying workers for Connecticut's labor market through the development of in-demand career pathways programming and supports. BRS Workforce Counselors are strategically located across the state in conjunction with the regional workforce development boards and review the needs of businesses, offer qualified candidates and assist in developing training plans before the new trainee/employee starts working.
- **The Connect to Work Project** allows individuals who receive Social Security disability benefits to better understand the impact returning to work will have on their disability benefits. 457 new consumers met with the Connect to Work Project benefits specialists. 411 individuals received benefits analysis services and 1068 follow-ups were completed. There were also 56 presentations and other outreach activities targeting underserved populations, especially young adults transitioning from high school to post-secondary education or work.
- **The Connecticut Tech Act Project** increases independence and improves the lives of people with disabilities by providing access to and acquisition of assistive technology devices and services for work, school and community living. 5,692 individuals received Assistive Technology services for independent living, educational assistance and employment support. Over 120 public awareness activities took place.
- **The Employment Opportunities Program** enables individuals with the most significant disabilities to engage in competitive employment by providing funding for long-term supports in order to maintain competitive employment. In SFY 2022, this program assisted 182 individuals.
- **The Independent Living Program** provides comprehensive independent living services to persons with significant disabilities through contracts with Connecticut's five community-based Centers for Independent Living. In FFY21\*, 2,876 distinct services were provided. In addition, 139 Independent Living Part B clients were served.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services** include the Counseling Program and the Aging and Disability Services Interpreter Registry. The Counseling Program provides counseling related to special language, communication and socioeconomic challenges unique to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. There were 743 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Services performed during SFY22 (which may include multiple referrals and



services during one session). The department also monitors and posts a statewide Interpreter Registry for all sign language interpreters working in Connecticut in accordance with state statute. There were 547 interpreters listed on the Connecticut Registry at the end of the fiscal year.

- **The Workers' Rehabilitation Program** assists individuals with work-related injuries to return to the workforce. During SFY22, 348 initial interviews were completed in the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. 284 clients achieved employment.

*\*Please note, some numbers were captured under the latest full Federal Fiscal Year reporting due to funding source, which ran from October 2020 to September 2021.*

### **Additional Information as Required by Statute**

- Aging and Disability Services has a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Administrative Services for all **Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity** (AA/EEO) programs and services. Under the direction of the Commissioner, the agency is responsible for ensuring compliance with a wide variety of federal and state laws and department policies that address equal employment and education. Activities related to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act include investigating grievances as well as determining, documenting and providing reasonable accommodations.
- **Affirmative Action Plan:** During the reporting period the Affirmative Action Plan was approved without condition. Aging and Disability Services has successfully achieved goals in many categories and classifications, thereby upholding its commitment toward achieving parity in the workforce. The department supports affirmative action and diversity in the workplace and actively seeks applicants from all sectors of the population and takes seriously the commitment to develop a workforce that reflects the diversity of the state and the client population it serves.



### *ADS Administrative Responsibilities*

- **Bureau of Organizational Support** - This partially centralized business unit provides a range of fiscal services for the department, including budget preparation and monitoring, accounting, vendor setup, accounts payable and receivables, and asset management.
- **Human Resources**- The Human Resources Division is centralized through the Department of Administrative Services, and available to support Aging and Disability Services by providing technical guidance and support for all the employees of the agency. Human Resources staff are involved in addressing issues which impact human resource management for the agency as a whole, through coordination of policy issues, involvement in labor relations activity and, in general, with the objective of ensuring that the quality of human resource service throughout the department remains consistent.
- **Legislative/Legal**- Includes both the Legislative Liaison and the Staff Attorney. The Staff Attorney acts as in-house counsel to the agency on a wide range of issues involving every aspect of the department's work; researches, interprets, analyzes and applies complex and conflicting laws and regulations. The staff attorney acts as a hearing officer and represents Aging and Disability Services in formal administrative and public proceedings. The Legislative Liaison advises on and coordinates legislative proposals. They also provide advocacy and representation at the General Assembly on behalf of Aging and Disability Services. The Legislative Liaison currently serves as the Ethics Liaison for the agency as well.
- **Public Information/Communications**- The Public Information Office is responsible for all departmental communications. This includes media inquiries, social media and agency websites. The Public Information Office also acts as the conduit for all Freedom of Information Act requests.
- **Strategic Planning and Operational Readiness** - The Office of Strategic Planning and Operational Readiness works with agency leadership to develop and support the department's strategic plan, helping to develop strategies and objectives for the achievement of agency mission and goals. They also prepare and update the agency's Continuity of Operations Plan, ensure the agency is in compliance with FEMA and similar emergency training requirements in the state, as well as working with senior staff and other state agencies and the Governor's Office for appropriate agency responses to emergency situations.