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## Health advocates fear name change Plan to streamline system cuts 'disabilities' title from division

By VICTOR GRETO / The News Journal

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Unlike a rose, a bureaucracy by any other name just isn't the same.

At least according to some disability advocates regarding a proposed reorganization of three divisions at the Delaware Health and Social Services Department.

"It's streamlining," said Vincent Meconi, department secretary, who introduced the changes internally to his department Jan. 20. "We're always looking for ways to make things more efficient."

Meconi said three divisions within his 11-division department - the divisions of services for aging and adults with physical disabilities, social services and state service centers - would merge into two. Those two would be called social services and aging, and medical assistance.

No services would be scaled back or cut, and no employees would be laid off, Meconi said. The primary reason for the change is the explosion of Medicaid coverage in the state, he said.

The changes have to be approved by the Legislature. If they are, they will go into effect in July.

But the proposed new division of social services and aging - sans "adults with physical disabilities" - is the rub that has upset a few advocates for disabled adults.

"The concern is that the physical disabilities wording is going to be removed and that they'll get left out of things," said Pat Maichle, director of the Developmental Disabilities Council of Delaware.

More than a decade ago when the division was named, "that name was added so that services could be provided for people with physical disabilities," she said. "The name change was deliberate. Dropping that name is a concern. At the very least, it's a symbolic thing."

Meconi said he was not "hung up on nomenclature," but that if others had a better idea for a title, "Let us know and we'll consider it."

Jamie Wolfe, a disabilities specialist at the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies, said she was involved in the previous name change. "The mind-set is very different between aging and adults with physical disabilities," she said. Wolfe said she will air her concerns at the Feb. 17 meeting of the governor's commission for community-based alternatives for individuals with disabilities. "The changes weren't even brought up at the commission, and we want to question why it wasn't," she said.

So does Rep. Pamela S. Maier, R-Drummond Hill, who also is part of the commission.

"We should have had a discussion about it instead of it coming down from on high," she said. She said she sent a letter to Meconi asking him to address the issue at the Feb. 17 meeting.

"Their numbers deserve a name," she said of adults with disabilities. "That's a point I'm going to make at the meeting."

Meconi said that Medicaid, a program that benefits about one of every six Delawareans and is the state's largest budget item at nearly \$800 million and growing, propelled the change. When it is moved within the division of medical assistance, "It will finally have its own divisional status," he said.

Other safety net programs - including food stamps, temporary assistance for needy families, general assistance and child care - would remain under the division of social services and aging, Meconi said.

The division of state service centers, which runs a variety of human services programs, would be put under the division of social services and aging under the plan. "It's a proposal and we invite commentary," Meconi said. "We've already received some good suggestions, including about the name."

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