

Below are Beth Mineo's comments regarding the state of Delaware's proposed plan to comply with the new federal rule that will allow more people with disabilities to choose community living over institutional settings. Her comments were delivered at a public hearing convened by Delaware's Division of Medicaid & Medical Assistance in Newark on Feb. 23.

The rule is a welcome catalyst for energizing Delaware's progress toward authentic community integration. Segregation is the consequence of outdated service delivery and funding models, and we won't achieve the goal of true inclusion until we eliminate the systemic barriers that have perpetuated a system offering far too few choices enabling people to live, work, and enjoy life alongside people without disabilities.

Delaware joins most of the rest of the country in needing to make a paradigm shift in the way it supports people with disabilities. We are moving from a model in which the "this is what you get; be satisfied" mentality shifts to a "tell us what you need and we'll figure out how to support you" approach. Systemic changes like this don't come easily to anyone involved in the process, even those who will benefit greatly from new opportunities for more inclusive life experiences.

Delaware's transition plan is, of necessity, about compliance, but it could be so much more. Currently, our plan is reactive. It talks about how we will evaluate and remediate services and supports that do not conform to the CMS requirements. It would be so much more powerful if it included a proactive component that could serve as a blueprint for how the services and supports system will look five years from now. Given the timeframe for submission of our plan, development of such a blueprint in the next few weeks isn't feasible. I would like to suggest, however, that our plan announce the state's intent to create such a blueprint and specify the timeframe within which it will be completed. As Lewis Carroll said, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." People with disabilities, their families, and our provider networks can be much more effective partners in this endeavor when the road ahead is more well-defined.

Along these same lines, the state could propel us in the right direction more quickly by incentivizing the types of innovations that promote full access to the greater community. Other states are not merely waiting for the service infrastructure to rearrange itself; they are actively promoting the creation of consumer-responsive services and supports. For example, in the realm of day services, Kentucky modified its reimbursement rates, offering higher rates for supported employment and reducing its rates for day programs. I don't think that there is any doubt that many individuals will select residential and employment services that are more integrated; Delaware's challenge is in ensuring that there are adequate and sufficient alternatives available. Incentivizing the creation of those alternatives is preferable to taking a "wait and hope" approach.