



DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES

COMMUNITY SERVICES

March 24, 2020

Dear Families,

As you probably have already heard, the Governor issued updates four and five to the State of Emergency on Sunday, mandating that all non-essential businesses close and Delawareans stay home as much as possible effective this morning. I wanted to update you on how DDDS and its providers are handling this situation.

The State of Delaware is not closed for business. All Department of Health and Social Services employees are considered essential. You should see no interruption in access to DDDS employees, although how you communicate with DDDS employees may change as we are no longer allowing face to face meetings. If someone's job duties allow them to work from home, they most likely are. There are some job functions that do not permit work from home and those staff are coming into their usual locations to work. To minimize exposure to others, some staff are working a staggered schedule. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your DDDS contacts via email, cell phone or office line during the COVID-19 outbreak. We are having some challenges forwarding state phone numbers to employee cell phones but all DDDS employees still have access to email, so when in doubt, please use email as the preferred method of communication, even if it just to ask a DDDS employee to call you. Unless you are using a secure email connection, we encourage you to not include "protected health information" in the email, such as the name of a DDDS service recipient. Discussing such information over the phone would be better.

We are all in this together, working to maintain normalcy and operations as much as possible.

With the order to stay home, we know routines have been upended. We know anxiety and stress levels are heightened. We know there are a few day service providers who are still maintaining operations, albeit with a dramatic drop in attendance. Many DDDS service recipients are still working in essential businesses and are receiving supported employment services still. We know there are residential providers who have had to modify staffing schedules substantially to ensure the health and safety of the individuals they support. The Division is allowing residential providers to request additional support hours to cover additional hours of support during the day when an individual would have otherwise been at a day program. We are also exploring options for Medicaid "retention" payments that may help to ensure that providers will be able to resume normal operations after the state of emergency is lifted. For those of you with loved ones living at home, we know there is an added pressure on you and the supports you need to maintain your household, while coping with the closure of schools and programs. Please reach out to the Division's Respite Coordinators, your DDDS Support Coordinator or your Columbus Community Navigator to talk about supports we may be able to approve.

To keep in touch, while in-person visits are restricted, we encourage you to utilize technology as much as possible. Use Facetime, Skype, Google Hangouts, or Zoom. If your loved one lives in a provider managed setting, think about recording messages for your loved one to listen to. You can make videos and post them to a private YouTube channel (only available if you provide the link to it). Sing his/her favorite song. Think about making different videos for different purposes. If s/he is having a hard time, is there a certain phrase that you say or a song you play that helps? U.S. mail still is being delivered, so think about sending some pictures and letters.

This truly is an incredibly difficult time and the direct support staff and providers want to do all they can to help keep you connected. The Division has encouraged day providers to consider making a standing weekly time for participants to check in together via Zoom or Skype. In these trying times, it is more important than ever to try to remain connected to those who we love and care about, while following the Governor's order to stay home and keep our social distance from others, especially those who are vulnerable with underlying health conditions, as many DDS recipients are.

Please continue to wash your hands thoroughly, practice sneeze and cough etiquette, and sanitize surfaces as much as possible. The Governor and Centers for Disease Control recommend limiting trips to the grocery store and pharmacy to essential trips only.

If you need anything, please reach out to your Support Coordinator or Columbus Community Navigator. We will get through this together.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cory Ellen Nourie" followed by the initials "MSS, MLSP" in a smaller font.

Cory Ellen Nourie, MSS, MLSP
Director of Community Services