

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statewide campaign seeks to save critical programs for more than 3,300 Arkansas children with special needs

The “Save My Services” campaign opposes DHS policy change to cut programs for children with developmental disabilities

LITTLE ROCK, AR. – The “Save My Services” statewide campaign launched today with the goal to increase public awareness of the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS)’s proposal to restrict Medicaid eligibility for children in developmental preschools. Over the next 18 months, this policy change will lead to over 3,300 children with special needs losing access to these critical services, and even more losing access in future years.

The DHS “one-therapy rule” rule will change current eligibility requirements for these programs, cutting critical services for more than 3,300 children with developmental delays and other special needs, all of whom are currently being served by non-profit providers. These children will become the responsibility of our mostly state-funded programs such as ABC, Head Start, Early Head Start, public school pre-k, or regular day care programs. Within just a few years, it would mean an influx of some 10,000 children into these programs, which do not have the capacity in terms of funding, available slots, specially trained staff, transportation nor infrastructure to address these children’s special needs.

The “Save My Services” campaign is supported by the Arkansas Developmental Disabilities Provider Association (DDPA) in partnership with up to 100 local programs currently servicing children with disabilities across the state and families of children with disabilities.

Children with developmental delays and disabilities are 7 to 10 times more likely to be expelled from regular day care. Research shows that developmental delays can be improved and even overcome through early intervention, enhancing overall quality of life.

Since 1984, community-based programs have partnered with the state to serve children with these special needs, with programs currently existing in over 100 Arkansas communities. Effective July 1, 2018, existing non-profit and for-profit providers currently serving some 19,000 children age birth to 5 across the state will be merged into one entity called “Early Intervention Day Treatment” (EIDT). DDPA supports this merger, however, DHS is proposing that children with developmental disabilities may not be served by EIDT unless they need at least “one therapy” (physical, occupational, speech), which not all of these children require. These are

distinct services for which there is no clinical justification to make one dependent upon the other in order to receive treatment.

This eligibility change will also have a negative impact on the economies of communities across the state, many of which are rural and already struggling. Other programs across the state would also be impacted, with some facing possible elimination altogether.

According to Janie Sexton of Building Bridges Developmental and Community Services, Inc., "This proposal that makes therapy part of a qualifying criteria in order to receive habilitation services disregards two critical pieces of early brain development – the areas of cognitive and social-emotional development. Cognitive and Social-emotional development have been linked to overall health outcomes and future learning potential. Delays in these two areas must be addressed, as well as delays in motor, communication, and adaptive (self-help) that are targeted with the therapy intervention."

The "Save My Services" campaign urges the public to contact their local state legislators and the Arkansas Governor's Office and ask them to "**remove the one therapy requirement**" so that children with special needs continue to have access to these critical services.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @SaveMyServices and learn more at www.SaveMyServicesAR.com

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For collateral materials including logos, images of children currently being served by these programs, and additional information: <https://1drv.ms/f/s!AmRgPLCiTJY6vC7LxyW360BI7cg1>

Family Testimonial

Bella always seemed to be a "gap" kid – everyone could agree she needed services, but she may not qualify for specific therapies. At the age of 19 months she started having meltdowns which would include screaming at the top of her lungs, thrashing on the floor, and hitting, kicking, and biting anyone close enough to reach. Due to these meltdowns, there was no way Bella could have been enrolled in a regular daycare.

Thankfully, Bella had access to ECCEL, a Developmental Day Treatment Clinic Services (DDTCS) program which she attended from the age of 2 months until Kindergarten. The summer after her ECCEL graduation, Bella received the autism diagnosis. It had been suspected since she was 2-1/2 years old, but Bella never hit the threshold for the diagnosis until then.

"I think back to this time in our life and can't imagine what I would have done without those services," **said Bella's mother Lori Coke-Stueart.** "I would hate for other families facing similar situations to not have access to those services. I would ask that you consider Bella and the thousands of children like her that need these services when voting on this issue.

About the Arkansas Developmental Disabilities Provider Association (DDPA)

The mission of the Developmental Disabilities Provider Association (DDPA) is to promote the shared interests of member non-profit agencies in their service to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing quality education, professional networking opportunities, and effective advocacy. www.arkansasddpa.org