

Stephanie Patrick, Chair
Disability Rights Center - NH

**Isadora Rodriguez-
Legendre, Vice Chair**
*NH Council on
Developmental Disabilities*

Members

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Community Support Network, Inc

Donna Corriveau
*Direct Support Professional
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Jessica Gorton
*Bureau of Developmental
Services*

Karen Hatch
Family Support Council Member

Lisa Steadman
Family Support Council Member

Deborah Opramolla
Family Support Council Member

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Private Provider Network

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People First of New Hampshire

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Adam Schrier
Brain Injury Association of NH

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Area Agency Board Member

Cathy Spinney
Area Agency Board Member

Rich Crocker
Area Agency Board Member

Mary St. Jacques
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Louis Esposito
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Kelly Ehrhart
At-Large Member

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September 30, 2024

Jessica Gorton (via email: jessica.d.gorton@dhhs.nh.gov)
Bureau Chief, Bureau of Developmental Services
New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
129 Pleasant Street, Concord, NH 03301

Re: Self-Advocacy Opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

Dear Chief Gorton,

We are writing today to express concerns with opportunities for people with developmental disabilities in their communities to come together across the state to learn and support one another in advocacy initiatives.

As you know, Kelly Ehrhart and Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre have been investigating self-advocacy opportunities supported by area agencies across the state. They have discovered that some area agencies are not currently supporting self-advocacy groups and do not plan to do so. Some area agencies do not believe that they are required to do so.

It is clear that the Bureau believes in the importance of self-advocacy. Self-advocacy groups are referenced numerous times in He-M 505, but there is no mention of the responsibility of supporting these groups.

We strongly believe that the Bureau of Developmental Services must support self-advocacy across the state. The Bureau has recognized the importance of this advocacy. In the current Developmental Disabilities 1915c waiver application, submitted in April 2023, the Bureau stated "Since 1992, BDS has assisted with funding for PFNH, a statewide independent self-advocacy organization. Currently, there are 14 recognized self-advocacy chapters and a total of 17 groups located throughout NH. Individuals with disabilities are members of local self-advocacy chapters and each chapter elects two representatives to serve

on the board of directors of PFNH. PFNH is a non-profit entity run and governed completely by individuals with disabilities.”

Support for People First is very valuable, but many of their members began their advocacy journey at the 14 recognized self-advocacy chapters and 17 groups referenced above. Many of these self advocacy groups have not met on a regular basis since COVID or earlier.

As we understand it, People First does not have the capacity to support local self advocacy groups across the state and we are not sure if members are even interested in assuming this responsibility.

We are writing today to request that the Bureau develop a plan to support local and regional self-advocacy efforts across the state. We hope you agree that these groups are very important to disability advocacy.

Please let us know your plan by November 1, 2024. We are happy to support these efforts if possible.

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Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Patrick
Chair, NH Developmental Services Quality Council