



December 31, 2008

Dear DSB Leader:

By now you have heard of the budgetary proposal offered by Governor Kaine, responding to a significant economic downturn, which would reallocate DSB Staffing and administrative support funds as noted below:

Reallocates \$519,362 used to support administrative functions of the Disability Service Boards (DSBs) to the department's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. This will eliminate all funds provided to DSBs used for administrative functions. Appropriation Act language has been included to override the mandate for localities to establish and maintain DSBs. The reallocation of funding will allow the department to address a growing waiting list of clients 24 years old and younger. The waiting list for VR services is expected to reach 1800 by July 1, 2009.

This is surely a great concern to you and me, but I would like to offer the following thoughts.

I was fortunate to have been around when the DSBs were created during the early years of the *Beyer Commission*. At that time, in the early 90s, our Commonwealth had few resources or programs to respond to the needs of persons with physical and sensory disabilities. As a result of your and your predecessors' advocacy and planning, the Commonwealth has seen the following advances in this area of need:

- Centers for Independent living have almost doubled;
- Brain Injury programming, almost nonexistent in the early 90s, now exceeds \$3m and there are 12 expanded or new programs serving the increasing number of consumers with Brain Injury;
- DRS Personal Assistance Services (attendant care) program now tops \$2m in funding and its defining characteristic of *consumer direction* is now embraced by other Medicaid Waiver efforts;
- Planning and Needs Assessment initiatives are routinely executed by the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities as required by federal guidance;

- Due to federal initiatives, like the *New Freedom Initiative*, transportation expansions have at their core specialized transit and paratransit; and
- There are new efforts to offer housing modification funds to those in need through local housing authorities and other venues.

The Commonwealth has truly benefited from the DSBs around the state, but one could say that the need at the state level has decreased and other required bodies do much of the work that was once done exclusively by DSBs.

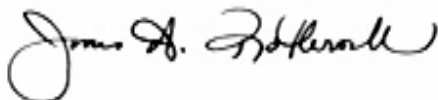
BUT that certainly does not mean that DSBs are no longer relevant!! Your advocacy and guidance to your local governments are critical. ADA issues that impact local governments are still evolving; many of you have already participated with the Virginia Department of Rail & Public Transportation on requisite local coordination planning initiatives. Housing and zoning efforts are beginning to emerge at the local levels and your input is critical. Efforts to offer community placement options to Virginians with disabilities responding to the *Olmstead Decision* are continuing to expand. The list of local issues that benefit from your input grows each year.

If the General Assembly adopts Governor Kaine's proposed budget action, Richard Kriner, our expert DSB staff support person, will be working with you to close down the current year. You will no longer be required to conduct a needs assessment; however, if you choose to do so, Richard will utilize the information as the SILC performs its planning role, I will assure that any guidance you may offer is considered by the Brain Injury Council, and we will offer any data you may have to the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities for their consideration in their identification of needs. Richard will also work with those DSBs that have RSIF grants to assure their successful completion.

Over the remaining months between now and July 1, 2009—when all state financial support will cease—we will be evaluating if there are other measures DRS can take to support the effective communication of DSBs with each other to share ideas in these difficult times; this suggestion was offered at a recent meeting with a small group of DSB leaders and does merit strong consideration.

Let me thank you again for your efforts at the state level and encourage you to keep on assisting your local governments and representing your constituents who look to you for advocacy right there in your own communities.

Sincerely,



James A. Rothrock,
DRS Commissioner