To: The Honorable Dennis P. Williama

        The Honorable Harris B. McDowell, III

        Joint Finance Committee Members

From: Developmental Disabilities Council

Date: March 14, 2011

RE: Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Families

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Pat Maichle and I am here representing the Developmental Disabilities Council. We have begun a process of strategic planning for our next 5 year state plan as required under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000.

In gathering and analyzing data and information concerning children and adults with developmental disabilities in order to determine the progress we've made as well as the needs and gaps yet to be addressed, we have identified the following.

1. Delaware does not do a good job collecting and reporting data of children ages birth to 5 who have disabilities. The current established data collection systems do not ask disability information (vital statistics, Kids Count, etc.) and the most recent data charts under the Census have no numbers for children birth to 5 with disabilities in Delaware. It is impossible to plan for this age group when we have no numbers from which to work.
2. The growing numbers of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren with full responsibility for them is amazing. Adults who have spent their lives working and raising their own children are finding themselves at retirement age having to assume the full time duties of taking care of young children. These grandparents who are sill working

must rely on services of the state such as; purchase of care support, day care, and health benefits under Medicaid. Without these services, grandparents would either have to stop working and supporting themselves and the children or they would not be able to care for the grandchildren who would then require foster care at a much higher expense to the state. Please continue these very important services for grandparents as well as for parents who are struggling to survive each day and take care of their young children.

3. Delaware does not do a good job of collecting and reporting data on the use of seclusion and restraint of children in our schools and in our care. A 2010 GAO report shows that the majority of children who had been secluded and or restrained in the United States were children with disabilities. In that brief study, the number of injuries and death of children were far too high. In order to serve children better, we need to know if we have a problem in this area and, if so, what can we do to rectify the problem. The U.S. Department of Education now requires the collection and reporting of the incidences of the use of seclusion and restraints. We are hopeful that the Delaware Department of Education and the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Families will soon be in a position to report on this information on a regular basis.

4. Finally, the systems have historically found it difficult to serve children with disabilities who must be placed in foster care. "Existing literature suggests that youth with intellectual disabilities are at increased risk of maltreatment in the form of abuse or neglect (AAIDD, Vol. 49, 2/11)" in any setting. Providers who are sufficiently trained to fulfill the needs of children with disabilities are hard to find and the children often are moved from home to home to home throughout their lives. Not only do these children have to overcome multiple traumas such as loss of parents and siblings, sometimes sexual assaults and physical assaults, but they also have to learn to deal with all of this as young children and with disabilities that often makes it difficult to even understand what is happening to them. We are requesting that sufficient funds be made available for those children in foster care with disabilities and their providers so that their needs are met on a day to day basis and so that they can enjoy a stable, loving, and empowering home for many years.

Thank you for your consideration of our thoughts and requests.