

LaDDC News

Leadership Changes at OCDD and LDH

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Mark Thomas has been named the new Deputy Secretary of the LA Department of Health (LDH). Mark has led the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) for over five years where he has overseen transformational changes to the waiver service delivery system, which this year will result in all individuals with developmental disabilities who have current needs receiving the waiver that best meets their needs. No longer will someone with an immediate need have to wait years for that need to be met. OCDD was able to accomplish this monumental task partly because Mark recognizes the importance of working with, and more importantly, listening to stakeholders. He is a person of integrity who is well respected by individuals with developmental disabilities, families, providers, advocates and government officials across the state. This respect is based upon a longstanding relationship of trust, his ability to handle situations in a professional and caring manner, and his proven track record in the field of developmental disabilities over the past 25 years. Mark is also a man who truly understands the meaning of public service. For these, and many other reasons, it's no surprise he was selected for this leadership position.

As LDH Deputy Secretary, Mark will supervise the Offices of Behavioral Health, Aging and Adult Services, Public Health, and Citizens with Developmental Disabilities. The Deputy Secretary also coordinates the Human Services Interagency Council which includes the Regional Human Services Districts/Authorities. The DD community is not losing Mark; he will always advocate for people with developmental disabilities and their families, and will now be able to advocate from a higher level of authority. The other populations served by LDH are the true beneficiaries, as they will now have Mark serving and advocating just as passionately for them as well.

It was also no surprise that Julie Foster Hagan was named as Mark's replacement for OCDD's Assistant Secretary. Julie has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for the past three years, working at Mark's side not only on the transformational waiver changes, but all of OCDD's major initiatives, such as transitioning the state into an Employment First State and the continued downsizing of the state's large residential facilities. Her values, work ethic, and intelligence are among the qualities which have earned her the respect of her colleagues, advocates, families, and providers. Having worked 19 years in various leadership positions at OCDD, Julie is knowledgeable and experienced in all



aspects of the service delivery system. She is also driven by the individuals and families we serve and will do everything in her power to afford them the opportunity to live self-determined lives in their own homes, fully included in their communities. As Assistant Secretary, Julie will be joining the Council as an official member. We look forward to our continued work with Julie and her team.

Mark will replace outgoing Deputy Secretary Michelle Alletto who has resigned to take a position with the Milbank Memorial Fund in her home state of New York. Upon assuming the Deputy Secretary position several years ago, Michelle soon became a friend to the DD community, often communicating the importance of not only maintaining, but also increasing home and community based services to legislators.

LDH also announced the upcoming departure of LDH Undersecretary and career employee, Jeff Reynolds, who has accepted the position of Vice Chancellor of Finance at LSU Shreveport. A constant presence at legislative committee meetings, Jeff often tells legislators he is "just an accountant," but Jeff is also a compassionate advocate with an enormous amount of historical knowledge of Medicaid and LDH's finances. Cindy Rives, currently serving as Deputy Undersecretary, will transition to the Undersecretary position. Cindy has 24 years of experience in public finance, the last ten with LDH, to draw upon in her new role.

The Council wants to thank both Jeff and Michelle for all they have done to improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities in Louisiana and to wish them the very best in their new positions.

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