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Dear OPWDD Stakeholders,

As you know, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is working diligently to improve our delivery of services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Last week, I announced plans to pursue development of a new federal research and demonstration waiver through which we can design significant programmatic, administrative and fiscal improvements to our service system.

This proposed waiver, which we are calling New York's "People First Waiver," will engage us in discussions with all of our stakeholders and staff as together we plan for a system of more efficient, equitable, individualized and fiscally sustainable services for people with developmental disabilities in New York State. For those of you not familiar with 1115 waivers, they are created to allow Medicaid funds to be used in ways that are not otherwise eligible.

The specific goals and program elements of the proposed waiver are embodied in the People First Waiver [concept paper](#) which is available on the [People First Waiver Application Web](#) page and also accessible through [OPWDD's homepage](#). This Web page will serve as the central information hub for what will become a collaborative application design process involving stakeholders across the state. Over the coming weeks and months, I hope you will rely on this Web page for updates on meetings scheduled, summaries of the discussions that occur at the various design team meetings, as well as key opportunities to submit online comments regarding specific elements of the waiver application. OPWDD is committed to using this Web page to ensure a transparent and accessible process.

As a first step in that process, my staff is currently developing plans and schedules for a series of "listening forums" through which I will personally meet with individuals and families across the state to gain input about the types of improvements we need to build into the new waiver application.

I am truly excited about this opportunity to get out into New York's communities and meet the individuals we support and their family members. With your help, I look forward to transforming our service system with the goal of always putting "People First."

Sincerely,

Courtney Burke
Commissioner