

The Vision of the Ohio Association of County Boards of MRDD is to promote self-directed and self-determined choices in programs, services and supports for individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities.

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY BOARDS

CELEBRATING THE ABILITIES OF OHIO'S 80,000 DISABLED INDIVIDUALS OF MRDD



More than 600 people attended the NATIONAL FORUM ON DISABILITY ISSUES Saturday, July 26 at the First Church of God Conference and Technology Center in Columbus. Two of the attendees, Ben Hollinger, superintendent of *Hocking County Board of MRDD*, and Robert Milliken, president of the *OACB* and a *Stark County Board of MRDD* board member, are pictured.



HB 562 Will Have Major Effects On County Boards Of MRDD

In June, both the *House of Representatives* and *Senate* approved House Bill 562, otherwise known as the Capital Appropriations Bill. The purpose for this bill was to make the necessary changes to capital appropriations for Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, and to adjust some operating appropriation for 2008 and 2009.

If you have the time and inclination, you could read the more than 1,000 pages that this bill encompasses. The *OACB* followed the bill very closely throughout the various committees and

votes, and here are the areas we think our membership will find more interesting.

On the positive side:

▶ 1.5 percent assessment has been removed from statute. This will enable *County Boards of MRDD* to save \$500,000 per year statewide. Previously, that money had gone into state coffers.

▶ A significant change is statutory language that allows an individual to

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VOLUME 3

AUGUST 1, 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sign Up Now For The 25th Annual Convention

The *Ohio Association of County Boards of MRDD* has announced its 25th ANNUAL *OACB* CONVENTION will be held October 27-29 at the Hilton at Easton.

"This convention has grown each year because we offer important training that people want and can use in their profession," said Dan Ohler, Executive Director of the *OACB*.

In addition to training, Mr. Ohler said the *OACB* looks for people who have great stories to tell to inspire those who work in the MRDD field. This year, the *OACB* is proud to host Kim Peek, the inspiration for the feature film *Rain Man*.

Kim was played by Dustin Hoffman, who won an Academy Award for his performance. In addition, the movie won "Best Picture," "Best Screenplay," and "Best Director."

"We are expecting this to be the best Convention we have ever hosted," Mr. Ohler predicted. "We are very excited that the Peeks will be with us each day of the Convention. I had the opportunity to attend one of their sessions last year and it was the most inspiring two hours I have experienced during my 10 years in our field."

For more information, contact the *OACB* office at 614-431-0616.

A Word From Our President ...

President Advocates To Change Agency Name

By Robert Milliken

President, OACB

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One thing about those of us involved in the developmental disability world in Ohio, we certainly have our opinions and are not afraid to express them, especially when it comes to a potential name change.



Robert Milliken

Unless you have had the good fortune of being on some extended vacation for the past few months, you probably have heard – and

weighed in – on the current conversation about whether to change the *Ohio Department of MRDD* to the *Ohio Department of DD*. Already, about 10 local counties have changed the name they do business under to *County Board of Developmental Disabilities*, dropping the “mental retardation” from their name.

At the July 14 *Ohio Association of County Boards of MRDD*, all 18 board members weighed in with their opinion about the name change. It was a lengthy discussion, but the consensus was reached that a name change was inevitable, and that the OACB needed to take the lead on this change.

That doesn't mean everyone was excited about a name change or even thought it should happen immediately.

But what it told me was that even the people who weren't 100-percent sold on the idea saw that change was in the wind.

There is a reason 43 states already have made the name change. There is a reason why so much attention has been given to something as seemingly simple as a name change. It's important.

With the economy in its current state and the 128th *General Assembly* facing an ugly biennial budget in just a few months, I have heard many people say, “Why are we spending time talking about such a non-issue?” I would respectfully disagree. It is an important issue because what we call ourselves is a direct reflection on not only our

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(above) Governor Ted Strickland was the guest of honor at a recent fundraiser hosted by Tom Pappas and Associates at Lindey's restaurant in German Village. Governor Strickland spoke to about 30 people who attended the event, including Gary Robinson of Lake Hospitals (far left); Dan Ohler, OACB Executive Director, and Larke Recchie of the *Ohio Association of Area Agencies* (far right). Governor Strickland spoke specifically to Ohler and Linda Oda, OACB Director of Communication, about issues affecting people with developmental disabilities and his willingness to help.

(below) On June 2, Governor Ted Strickland signed into law House Bill 405 – Representative Kevin Bacon's first bill – at the Statehouse. The new law, which takes affect Sept. 1, reduces the number of waiting lists so that the waiver process is simplified for families, and it also make the priority groups for waiver enrollment permanent. They were slated to expire June 30, 2009. OACB Executive Director Dan Ohler is pictured with Representative Bacon and Governor Strickland at the signing.



Staying Active Nationally Is Very Important

By Dan Ohler

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In mid-July, I had the opportunity to attend the Summer Board Meeting of the *National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)* in



Dan Ohler

Kansas City. As an affiliate of the *National Association of Counties* (i.e. the trade association that represents County Commissioners at the national level), our meetings are held at the same location.

While in Kansas City, I was engaged in conversations from surrounding

states, including Michigan and Pennsylvania, as well as those more distant states, like Utah and Oregon. Other states participating included Kansas, Iowa, Texas, New York, California, Minnesota, Illinois and Virginia, to name a few.

One of the things that struck me, as it does nearly every time I have the privilege to interact with these professionals, is the high quality of leaders that have dedicated themselves to serving our nation's most vulnerable citizens.

Another thing that stands out is that nearly all of us experience the same issues. For example, County Boards in Pennsylvania no longer have the authority to contract with providers of HCBS waiver services. Oregon has proceeded with caution on a consumer-directed waiver as the requirement for an independent service broker. This threatens the ability of the county to do effective case management (i.e., service and support administration).

New York is struggling to allow individual counties flexibility in service packages, while not jeopardizing fed-

eral reimbursement for a perceived lack of statewideness. Every state represented would have faced huge losses in targeted case management had the *U.S. Congress* not blocked the implementation of new regulations put forth by the *Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services*, albeit if only for a year.

In a meeting with other Association Executive Directors, it was unanimous that to be effective, we could not just be in tune with our state capitol, but we had to be in touch with our nation's capital as well. Regardless of how much local and state funding was in our respective systems, every county agency from every state represented needed Medicaid dollars to effectively serve individuals and reduce waiting lists (yes, everyone has waiting lists).

Clearly, our State has seen better economic times. So too have many others. We pin our hopes for the future on the outcome of the next election. So too do many others. We think the grass is cer-

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Golf Outing Benefits All Of Us

We need your help – simple as that. Each year, the *OPAC-MR – the Political Action Committee* that allows us to raise money to help legislators who are willing to help those with developmental disabilities – hosts a golf outing.

It is important to note, this is not an *OACB* event. Our employees take a vacation day to work the event because they understand its importance.

We hope representatives from all 88 *County Boards of MRDD* will participate by sponsoring a sign (\$150) or donating a door prize (anything from a small gift basket to something much larger, like a TV

set). It would be great if each county would create a basket of things that their county is known for. For example, a basket from Warren County could include four passes to Paramount's Kings Island or candy from the Golden Turtle.

We still need golfers too. The event is Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008. Tee off is 1 p.m. at the Golf Club of Dublin. A steak dinner will follow. The cost to golf is \$125 and includes dinner. If you would like to attend the dinner, but not golf, the cost is \$50 per person.

For more information, contact Ann Neu at aneu@oacbmrrd.org or 614-431-0616.

MBI Update

All of us who fought for Medicaid Buy-In always knew it was important. We are certain many of you have "good news" stories that you could share.

The *OACB* recently heard from a County Superintendent to let us know how Medicaid Buy-In was working. Their first person has already seen a huge improvement on his budget and quality life.

Previously, he was paying just under \$500 a month as his patient liability to his residential provider. Today, he is paying just \$4.08. That means he can spend the money he was previously paying to just exist for other things, including entertainment, better quality food, etc.

It is working. And it was worth the effort.



Representative Jim Zehringer and Senator Keith Faber talk to Kelly Tolly, an enclave supervisor for *PCBMRDD*, and Kim Perry, far right. Kim is served by the *PCBMRDD* and works at *Henny Penny*, a manufacturer of fryers and components, during a recent Legislator's Day. Superintendent Diane Knupp hosted local, county and state officials, and toured facilities where individuals served by the *PCBMRDD* are employed. The day was capped off by an *Eaton Rotary Club* luncheon. The purpose of the Legislator's Day was to educate local, county and statewide elected officials about the programs operated by the *PCBMRDD*.

Self-Advocates Sought For Statewide Speakers' Bureau

Two self-advocates are working to create a statewide speakers bureau.

Christine Brown, owner of *Brown-Cooley Associates in Self-Determination* in Fairfield County, and associate Ruben Garcia of Lucas County, are looking for self-advocates from throughout the state of Ohio.

"The voices of people with disabilities in the MRDD System needs improved," Christine and Ruben say. "Individuals like us and other individual Self-Advocates live in the system and know what it feels like of what is going well, needs improved or changed."

Christine said the speaker bureau's mission is to have individuals going across the state to raise the voice of local, county, state and legislative issues affecting the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

To apply, please send your resume and cover letter to Christine Brown, *Brown-Cooley Associates in Self-Determination*, 651-C Lakeview Plaza Blvd., Worthington OH. 43085. You can also contact Christine Brown by email at Christi628@sbcglobal.net or phone at 740-653-2391.

Thanks Union County Board of DD!

Public relations specialists from throughout the state recently participated in a quarterly meeting, which was hosted by Carol Schneider and the *Union County Board of DD*. The meeting was moderated by Linda Oda, *OACB* Director of Communication. The group discussed the pros and cons of dropping "MR" from the *Ohio Department of MRDD*, building relationships inside and outside of county agencies, legislative updates, and fundraising for levy campaigns.

Pictured are (seated) Bernadette Hinline, Heather Odendahl, Sue Munday, Andrea Perry, (standing) John Bosser, Tim Pfister, Cathy Smith, Cindy Maag, Brianne McGrath, Carol Schneider, Dottie Fay and Corey Mangan.



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convert from an ICFMR to a waiver, and the money would truly follow the person. This is a big step in allowing people to live in the least restrictive setting, said Dan Ohler, *OACB* Executive Director. "While there remains many unanswered questions about exactly how the funding transfer will take place, this is a step in the right direction in terms of allowing individual choice without fear of losing the source of funding. I applaud the members of the *General Assembly* for limiting this to 100 individuals during the biennium so that it may serve as a pilot program to allow us to work out whatever kinks may pop up," he said.

▶ *County Boards of MRDD* have more flexibility in the use of housing dollars. In the past, *County Boards of MRDD* could only rehab existing homes; they were unable to have new homes built. Ohler said there are already a couple of *County Boards of MRDD* that plan to work with their local vocational schools to build handicap accessible homes for clients. "It is more cost efficient to work with vocational schools to build housing that is accessible from the start, than to try and make a typical house handicap accessible," he said.

Of course, there is an item of concern: local government reform. A committee of 15 people is being put together and will begin deliberating the purposes of local government entities Sept. 1, 2008. They are expected to give a complete and final report in July 2010. *County Boards of MRDD* have no direct representation on this commission. "This committee is going to cause everything we do to be held under the microscope. Just because we've been operating as a separate identify for 41 years successfully does not mean it will continue," Ohler said. Each of the 88 *County Boards of MRDD* should use this as an opportunity to examine their operations and insure they are maximizing their resources to ensure quality services to individuals with developmental disabilities, Ohler continued.

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agencies, but on the people we serve.

The *OACB* is in the beginning process of hiring an outside agency to conduct a thorough survey to ascertain our stakeholders' view on this issue. This survey will include all stakeholders, the most important of which are the individuals we serve.

This information will allow all of us to make an informed decision based on data, not opinions. If we were operating a clubhouse or team, opinions would be sufficient. But we're not. We are operating agencies that encompass thousands of individuals with developmental disabilities. We are required to make decisions involving millions of dollars. We must continue to allow data to dictate our actions, not just our own thought processes.

The one factor I have been extremely pleased about is the depth of the discussions that have occurred. It is clear to me, having participated in several of these conversations, that people are passionate about their beliefs and are willing to stand up for what they believe is right.

I would love to see these kinds of passionate conversations occur on any number of topics that currently face our 88 *County Boards of MRDD*.

Like you, I am anxiously awaiting the outcome of this survey, and hope that all of us react in the manner that would best serve the 80,000 people

we are privileged to serve.

to take into account their mental capacity at the time the mistake was made. The bottom line is we still need to advocate for all 80,000-plus individuals with MRDD in Ohio. We just need to be knowledgeable and think each case through with thoughtful consideration.

In the months and years to come, we need to continue to educate ourselves so that we can speak more definitively on Ohio's most vulnerable population and their abilities. We need to be able to offer our expertise to the judicial system to better equip our judges in making the best decisions.

We have come too far to begin labeling our adults as "children" when they have the capacity to know the consequences of their actions. On the flip side, we have just as many people who can't distinguish right from wrong. For those individuals, we need to be prepared to supply logical and understandable explanations for the complexities of their disabilities.

As advocates for the MRDD community, we need to be able to discern the difference between those who have no understanding of their actions and those who may use it to their advantage.

The *Supreme Court of Ohio* did the right thing in overturning Mr. White's case. All of us need to be preparing for the next time an individual with MRDD needs our help.

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tainly greener in other states. So too do many others. We face funding challenges. So too do many others. We struggle at times to understand the position taken by our state agency. So too do many others.

None of these issues are new - we have faced them before and dare I suggest we shall face them again. But our quest must remain the same, and our focus unaltered by the obstacles before us. Our mission is enhancing the lives of Ohioans with developmental disabilities! We do it because we care. We do it to make a difference. So too do others.