

January 16, 2026

Little Hoover Commission
925 L St., Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: ARCA Comments for Little Hoover Commission on California's Developmental Disabilities System

Honorable Commissioners:

California's regional centers are a network of 21 community-based non-profits, represented by the Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA). The regional centers coordinate services for, and advocate on behalf of, nearly 500,000 Californians with developmental disabilities. California's entitlement to developmental services is unique nationally, while other states leave people waiting ten years or more for entry into their comparable system. ARCA appreciates the opportunity to offer formal comments to update the Little Hoover Commission on the developmental services system's progress in improving service delivery over the last three years.

In its April 2023 report, the Commission made the following overarching recommendations and suggested potential strategies for each:

1. Increase consistency in client experiences across regional centers;
2. Target and reduce racial and ethnic disparities;
3. Strengthen state oversight of the developmental disabilities system;
4. Modernize technology;
5. Standardize the vendorization process;
6. Strengthen and enhance support for regional center governing boards; and,
7. Improve service coordination.

While systemic change and evolution has continued since the release of the Commission's report, two notable developments helped accelerate it. First, [SB 138](#) was enacted in 2023 and required the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to lead a variety of consistency measures intended to improve the experience of those served by regional centers and their families. Second, in 2024 California's Health and Human Services Agency began a yearlong process to develop the Master Plan for Developmental Services, which included monthly public meetings and more than 40 stakeholder engagement opportunities. This process culminated in a report with 167 recommendations for potential strategies to strengthen California's developmental services system. Similar to the specific recommendations in the Commission's report, each of these efforts focused on system improvements to promote equity, strengthen consistency, and support person-centered service delivery.

As discussed below, over the last three years there have been a number of developments specific to the recommendations of the Commission.

Increased Consistency

As referenced above, SB 138 provided a framework for DDS to drive greater statewide consistency in the developmental services system. Since its enactment, several [initiatives](#) have been completed, such as the standardized IPP process and template, and were informed by both promising regional center practices and robust community input. In implementing other reforms, such as a standardized respite assessment tool and the development of a consistent intake process, ARCA commends DDS and policymakers for their willingness to ensure the reforms meet their intended objectives rather than racing to complete them to meet arbitrary deadlines. Other consistency efforts have been led by regional centers themselves through ARCA, such as mutual agreement around how to approach [in-person meeting requirements](#), [strategic organization thinking](#), and [leadership expectations](#). To enhance predictability and consistency for those they serve, regional centers have also achieved consensus on staff training curriculums (*e.g.*, social recreation), the creation of transparency portals for sharing public information, and processes for transferring cases between one another – including during intake. The work of regional centers does, however, continue to be informed by the specific needs of their local communities.

Reduce Disparities

At the core of equity work is ensuring people have ways to describe themselves in meaningful ways in collected data. Consistent with a Commission recommendation in this area, beginning in early 2025 regional centers implemented required updates to demographic data collection. Work continues in collaboration with community-based organizations through Service Access and Equity grants, Linguistic Access and Cultural Competency funds, and everyday practice to support regional centers' diverse communities. Work has centered on targeted outreach, linguistic capacity building as measured by [Regional Center Performance Measures](#), intensive training in person-centered practices, and the development and strengthening of services targeted to the needs of diverse populations (*e.g.*, social recreation and Coordinated Family Support Services).

Strengthen State Oversight

Since the beginning of 2023, DDS has used its established authority to issue more than 250 [directives](#) to regional centers on everything from supporting communities in response to emergencies to monitoring services for compliance with federal requirements. Regional centers have, in turn, modified their business practices to implement these directives at the community level, which allows the policies to benefit individuals and their families directly. Also aligned with the Commission's recommendations, in tandem with increasing funding through the phased-in rate reform process, DDS has issued guidance that has clarified specific service definitions and expectations to enhance consistency in service delivery. This initiative has required regional centers to work with each of their service providers to understand and adopt new expectations, planning teams to explore the unique mix of services for each individual under the consistent definitions, and accounting and vendorization departments to generate fresh service authorizations to support this work. These efforts not only strengthen state oversight but contribute to a more consistent statewide experience for individuals served by regional centers.

Modernize Technology

DDS has continued to lead foundational efforts for the replacement of regional center accounting and case management IT systems. In alignment with this process, regional centers have worked with DDS to map existing processes and offer insights into potential system efficiencies and solutions. Regional center staff are also engaged in data clean-up activities to support this work. In the meantime, SANDIS, the regional centers' legacy case management system, has been updated to support greater insight for vendors into active service authorizations and plans to roll out an individual and family portal to provide people with greater access to their own records in real time soon.

Standardize Vendorization

In its comments to the Commission in the Fall 2022, ARCA recommended standardization of vendorization. In 2023 regional center representatives came to agreement on the documentation required to carry out vendorization for various service categories and used that work to inform DDS's process in this area. At the end of 2025 regional centers began using the standardized vendorization process. Regional center staff helped inform this work, are modifying business practices to support it, and working alongside existing and prospective vendors to implement it. Standardized vendorization goes further than anyone imagined three years ago and is being used in conjunction with other processes to create a database of statewide vendors that will be used for mass communication and mapping service availability, including holes that need to be filled.

Strengthen Regional Center Boards

Regional center boards have tremendous responsibilities to both their organizations and the communities they support. ARCA created its ARCA Academy project in 2020 and has provided trainings for regional center board members throughout the state every year since. This year's in-person event saw more than 150 people come together for two days with an intentional focus on strengthening board members and supporting them to carry out their work. In August 2025 ARCA's Board of Directors approved a comprehensive [report](#) that outlines the key knowledge, skills, and competencies every board member should possess and outlines training expectations and resources for each. Given the critical roles boards fill in contracting with the state, shaping local policy, and considering stakeholder feedback, strengthening their capacity remains a top priority for ARCA.

Improve Service Coordination

Each person served by a regional center is matched with a service coordinator whose job includes the identification of needs and supporting them to access needed resources, whether funded by the regional centers or not. Investments in service coordination over the last few years, including targeted investments for young children, those with complex needs, and those who have historically accessed fewer paid services through the regional center, have reduced service coordinator caseloads overall. This has enabled service coordinators to spend more time with each person they support, which is essential to strengthen person-centered planning. Additionally, new service coordinators now complete [robust training on consistent topics](#) designed to equip them with knowledge and competencies to support their effectiveness. Other community-based systems navigation projects, such as one available through family resource centers, are also available to support the unique needs of some populations.

ARCA appreciates the opportunity to update the Commission on all that has been accomplished in the last three years. Regional centers remain committed to continuing to work with their partners – individuals served, their families, service providers, community organizations, DDS, and policymakers – to improve the services and supports provided to nearly 500,000 Californians with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

If you have any questions regarding ARCA's perspectives on these critical issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at awestling@arcanet.org or (916) 446-7961.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Westling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amy" and last name "Westling" clearly distinguishable.

Executive Director