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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH of PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

ID/A: Transition from Youth to Adult Services

Tuesday, August 4, 2026 | 10:00 a.m.

Rep. Paul Friel, Rep Danielle Friel Otten

TOUR

10:00 a.m.

Tour of The Camphill School Transition Program at Beaver Farm

OPENING REMARKS

10:45 p.m.

Rep Paul Friel, D-Chester

Rep. Danielle Friel Otten, D-Chester

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

10:50 p.m.

Guy Alma, Director of Development

The Camphill School for Children and Youth with Disabilities

Emma Brunner, Director

Delphi Provider

Chip Riddleberger, Director of Government Relations

KenCrest

Stephanie Kilcoyne, ID Deputy Administrator

Chester County Dept. of Mental Health/Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

Anna Thomas, Parent

Daughter attended The Camphill School

Q & A with Legislators

PA House Democratic Policy Hearing
Transitioning from School to Adult Life

Emma Brunner, MA, BS, C.C.E.

Director, Delphi Provider LLC

Good morning, and thank you to Representative Friel, the House Democratic Policy Committee, and everyone here today for taking the time to learn about the challenges and opportunities facing individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they transition into adulthood.

My name is Emma Brunner, and I am the founder and Director of Delphi Provider. Every day, we support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. Our mission is simple: to help people build meaningful, fulfilling lives as valued members of their communities.

When students leave high school at age 21 or 22, many families believe there will be a clear pathway into adulthood. Unfortunately, that is often not the reality.

For many, the structure, friendships, purpose, and opportunities they experienced in school disappear almost overnight. Parents are left trying to navigate complicated systems, waiting lists, funding limitations, transportation barriers, and a shortage of qualified staff. Too often, individuals who spent years learning and growing end up sitting at home because there simply aren't enough services or opportunities available.

At Delphi, we believe adulthood should be about far more than simply filling hours in a day.

Every person deserves purpose.

Purpose might be volunteering at an arboretum, helping care for animals, stocking shelves at a local business, learning woodworking, serving customers in a café, gardening, making crafts, or participating in community events. These activities aren't just hobbies—they build confidence, friendships, communication skills, independence, and a sense of belonging.

One of the things we are most proud of is that our participants are visible in their communities. They aren't hidden away in segregated programs. They volunteer beside community members, develop relationships with local businesses, and contribute in meaningful ways. Many people who once had no opportunities outside their homes are now recognized by name wherever they go.

That transformation is powerful—not only for the individuals we support, but for our communities as well.

However, creating these opportunities is not easy.

Finding and retaining Direct Support Professionals remains one of our greatest challenges. DSPs perform incredibly important work. They teach life skills, ensure health and safety, provide behavioral support, assist with communication, help people access employment and volunteer opportunities, and often become trusted mentors.

DSPs perform highly skilled, demanding work. They teach life skills, ensure health and safety, provide behavioral support, support communication, assist with employment and community participation, and often become trusted mentors and advocates. They have an enormous impact on the quality of life of the people they support.

The issue isn't simply pay—it's consistency.

Like everyone else, DSPs are facing rising costs for housing, food, fuel, and healthcare. They want to know that if they dedicate themselves to this profession, they can expect a meaningful wage increase each year that helps keep pace with the cost of living. They shouldn't have to wonder whether the Commonwealth will provide a reimbursement increase this year, next year, or not at all.

At Delphi, we choose to pay our staff a higher rate because we believe they deserve it. However, those higher wages often come directly out of our already narrow operating margins. Every dollar we invest in increasing wages reduces our ability to expand benefits, invest in new programs, or provide additional annual raises in the future.

Our staff have told us something very simple: they want money in their paychecks. They aren't asking for gym memberships or flashy perks, some don't even have or at this point want health insurance. They want the security of knowing that their hard work will be recognized through reliable, annual wage increases that allow them to support their families and build a career in this field.

For providers to offer that stability, we also need stability. Sporadic reimbursement increases make long-term planning nearly impossible. A predictable funding model with consistent annual rate increases would allow providers to budget responsibly, invest confidently in their workforce, improve retention, and ultimately provide better continuity of care for the people we support.

Investing in the DSP workforce is one of the most important investments Pennsylvania can make. Stable funding creates stable providers, stable staff, and, most importantly, stable lives for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

One of the other barriers to creating meaningful opportunities is not a lack of ideas—it's the difficulty of turning those ideas into reality.

At Delphi, we are constantly looking for innovative ways to create opportunities for the people we support. Whether it's developing volunteer partnerships, creating small business ventures, opening community spaces, or building employment pathways, every new idea seems to encounter another obstacle.

Providers must navigate a maze of regulations from multiple agencies, including ODP, the Department of Labor, Medicare and Medicaid requirements, employment laws, licensing regulations, and countless other rules. Too often, there is no single place to go for clear, consistent guidance. Different agencies may provide different interpretations, or providers are left waiting weeks or months for answers—if they receive an answer at all.

There is very little flexibility to try new approaches, no formal mentorship for providers who want to build innovative programs, and virtually no funding available to help develop new services before they are operational. Innovation is encouraged in principle, but the systems needed to support that innovation simply aren't there.

Imagine if providers had access to a dedicated resource where they could receive clear answers, technical assistance, mentorship from experienced organizations, and start-up funding to pilot new ideas. Instead of spending months trying to determine whether something is even permitted, providers could spend that time building opportunities that improve lives.

If Pennsylvania truly wants individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have meaningful choices, then it must also support the providers who are creating those choices. Innovation requires more than encouragement—it requires guidance, flexibility, collaboration, and investment. When providers are empowered to build new programs, individuals gain more opportunities to work, volunteer, learn, and become active members of their communities.

At Delphi, we've seen what is possible when communities work together.

Local businesses have welcomed our participants into their workplaces. Community organizations have opened their doors. Volunteers, families, employers, schools, and providers have formed partnerships that benefit everyone involved.

These relationships demonstrate that inclusion is not only possible—it enriches our entire community.

As policymakers, you have an opportunity to strengthen these outcomes by investing in the workforce, reducing unnecessary barriers, supporting solutions, and ensuring providers have the resources necessary to create meaningful opportunities instead of simply maintaining services.

Every young adult leaving school deserves more than a waiting list.

They deserve a future.

A future where they can contribute, learn, develop friendships, experience success, and live with dignity and purpose.

That future is possible. We see it every day.

The question is not whether individuals with disabilities can contribute to their communities.

The question is whether we, as a Commonwealth, will continue investing in the supports that allow them to do so.

Thank you for your time today and for your commitment to improving the lives of Pennsylvanians with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I appreciate the opportunity to share Delphi's experiences and look forward to answering any questions.