



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health & Human Services
Department of Mental Retardation
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Dear Colleagues and Stakeholders,

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is dedicated to supporting individuals with intellectual disability to participate fully and meaningfully as valued members in their communities. This is the cornerstone of our mission statement and remains as relevant today as it was when first framed.

The first guiding principle in our mission statement is:

To respect the dignity of each individual through vigorous promotion of human and civil rights which, in part, strive to keep people free from abuse or neglect.

As Commissioner of DDS, I am committed to a zero tolerance policy towards abuse and neglect, and know that our entire community shares in this essential focus. Despite our shared commitment, however, we know that individuals with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than the general population. Given knowledge and the tools to speak up for themselves, however, individuals can be empowered to prevent or minimize the potential for abuse. In addition, organizations that support individuals can create and support a culture at all levels that both respects individuals and seeks to prevent instances of abuse.

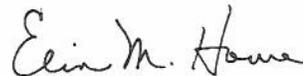
It is with this understanding in mind that I am pleased to announce that DDS has partnered with the IMPACT: Ability Project funded through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Project operated out of Triangle, a provider in the Northeast Region, seeks to give individuals with disabilities the tools they need to protect their safety, advocate for

themselves, and report unsafe interactions to trusted supporters. The project also works in collaboration with organizations to assist them to create a culture of awareness and support to prevent the occurrence of abuse. In addition to training opportunities already underway, including the Awareness and Action program, the IMPACT: Ability training has a clear emphasis on abuse prevention and empowerment of individuals. The IMPACT: Ability Project in partnership with Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS) places a great deal of emphasis on including individuals with disabilities on all levels, including the Statewide Steering Committee and the DDS Leadership Team.

In the near future, we will be sharing more information regarding the IMPACT trainings, which DDS will be offering in the Northeast Region of the State. Over time, we hope to make these trainings available statewide. In addition, we will be distributing videos and other written materials to assist our providers and stakeholders in our continuing efforts to prevent and reduce the occurrence of abuse and exploitation.

I know you share our commitment to this worthy goal and welcome your partnership in our efforts to support and empower individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Elin M. Howe
Commissioner

