

Eye on Advocacy

Weekly E-Newsletter

January 20, 2026

COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT WORKGROUPS

Phase 2 Workgroups

Workforce Development & Frontline Supports
Support Coordinator Role & Responsibility



NJCDD's Eye on Advocacy weekly e-newsletter is published every Tuesday, focusing on important news and events for the intellectual and/or developmental disabilities community. You are welcome to submit news items and feedback to njcdd@njcdd.org

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COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT WORKGROUPS

for Safe, High-Quality Licensed Residences for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Phase 2 Sign Ups:
January 15 to February 15th

Phase 2 Workgroups

Workforce Development & Frontline Supports

Support Coordinator Role & Responsibility

Over the past several months, the [New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities](#), the [Regional Family Support Planning Councils](#), and the [Office of the Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families](#) have gathered extensive community input to inform the [Community Blueprint for Safe, High-Quality Licensed Residences](#). Through listening sessions, a survey, and a memo to Governor-Elect Mikie Sherrill, we identified strengths, challenges, and opportunities in New Jersey's licensed residential services for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD).

Based on this input, we have created seven workgroups that reflect the stakeholder priorities. These will launch in phases over the next four months.

Phase Two workgroups focus on the direct care workforce and support coordinators, specifically:

(1) **Workforce Development & Frontline Supports**
strengthening skills for frontline staff and supervisors

(2) **Support Coordinator Role & Responsibility**
defining roles and responsibilities for monitoring the health and safety of individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities

Sign-Up Form

Timeline of Workgroups

Sign-up periods and first meeting dates

Summary of Workgroups & Objectives

We strongly encourage you to review these resources before signing up for the workgroups:

Background Resources

Listening sessions ([YouTube](#)), [Community Blueprint](#), and [Memo to Governor-Elect Sherrill](#)

In order to reflect diverse representations, we are working to create a balanced group of stakeholders that includes individuals with disabilities, family members, guardians, state representatives, provider agency representatives, frontline staff, support coordinators, and others. Please share the Community Blueprint Workgroup sign-up information with your personal networks.

Before signing up, we strongly encourage you to review all seven workgroups and their objectives, reflect on your current time commitments, and register only for the workgroups for which you have the most interest and in which you will be able to meaningfully participate.

We ask all participants to bring a spirit of respect, openness, and collaboration to these workgroups. Each voice is vital, and the aim is to collectively advance systems change that leads to safer, stronger, and higher-quality licensed residences for individuals with IDD across our state.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Kerry McGrath at 609-984-4516 or Kerry.mcgrath@njcdd.org.

NJCDD Announces Promotion and New Team Member



Kyoko Coco
Deputy Executive Director

NJCDD is excited to announce that Kyoko Coco has been promoted to the Deputy Executive Director position. The Deputy Executive Director position is mission-critical to the operation of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD). The Deputy Executive Director works closely with the Executive Director to manage the Council's overall direction and priorities. The role is also responsible for ensuring that the Council's programs and initiatives comply with the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act and are aligned with New Jersey's five-year state plan.

Most recently, Kyoko Coco spent 12 years serving as the Council's Family Support Coordinator, where she supported the Regional Family Support Planning Councils and drew on her lived experience as both a sibling and a parent of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Previously, she worked at New Alternatives for Children, a child welfare agency in New York City that provides comprehensive services to children with disabilities and their families. A licensed social worker in New Jersey, Coco holds a Master of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis and a Master of Social Work and a Bachelor of Policy Studies from Kwansei Gakuin University. She is currently serving as Vice-Chair of the Southern Region Children's Coordinating Council and is a certified Charting the LifeCourse Ambassador.

Mercedes Witowsky, NJCDD Executive Director, said, "We are delighted to have Kyoko assume the position of Deputy Executive Director, as we will continue to benefit from her wisdom, dedication, and strong commitment to people with IDD and their families."

Also, Ebony Freeman recently joined NJCDD as the Communications Manager. In this role, she works closely with the Council's executive director, staff, and volunteer advocates to disseminate vital information about the Council's mission, public policy positions, and advocacy efforts to statewide disability stakeholders, legislators, government agencies, and the public. Freeman brings nearly two decades of marketing and communications experience, having worked in both for-profit and non-profit organizations, including Ford, Honeywell, and the Knowles Teacher Initiative. She holds a Master of Business Administration in marketing and management from Rutgers University-Camden and a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing from Howard University. "Ebony has been a welcome addition to the team," Witowsky said. "Her branding and strategic communications experience allow her to plan, craft, and distribute targeted messaging that speaks to the wants and needs of individuals with IDD and their families."



Ebony Freeman
Communications Manager

Upcoming Events



OUR SPEAKER
KOURTNEY PULLIAM, MPH
Division of Family Health Services
New Jersey Department of Health



SPECIAL CHILD HEALTH SERVICES

Free Care Coordination for Children and Youth Under 22 with Special Health Care Needs

- 📅 January 20, 2026
- 🕒 7pm - 8pm
- 📺 Virtual

Are you a parent or caregiver of a child or youth under 22 with special health care needs?

[Register Here](#)

Join us for a virtual presentation on Special Child Health Services, a free program that supports children and youth under 22 with special healthcare needs across New Jersey. Learn how Special Child Health Services Care Management Units help families coordinate medical and specialty care, navigate complex service systems, and access community, financial, and family supports.

The presentation will be led by Kourtney Pulliam, MPH, Program Manager with the Division of Family Health Services, Special Child Health Services–FCCS in the New Jersey Department of Health.

Multi-lingual closed captioning is available for this event. Contact Kerry McGrath at kerry.mcgrath@njcdd.org or 609-984-4516 if you have any questions.

DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS
PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANCE:
FROM APPLICATION TO APPROVAL
A Two-Part Webinar Series
ASL interpretation and captioning will be available

FRIDAY
JAN. 16
11AM TO 12PM

FRIDAY
JAN. 23
2PM TO 3PM

A WEBINAR FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS, AND PROFESSIONALS

Join the staff of Disability Rights New Jersey for an informative two-part webinar series about Personal Care Assistance (PCA).
This webinar will cover everything from eligibility criteria to beneficiary's rights through the application and appeals process.

WHY DOES PCA MATTER?
PCA provides critical support to enable people with disabilities to have the assistance needed to perform daily tasks such as bathing, dressing, and eating, as well as enhance independence and dignity, ensure safety, and improve quality of life for people with disabilities.

REGISTER TODAY

SCAN THE QR CODE OR FOLLOW THE LINK:
<https://bit.ly/491PXCA>

Webinar Series – Personal Care Assistance: From Application to Approvals (Part Two)

Please join the staff of Disability Rights New Jersey for an informative two-part webinar series about Personal Care Assistance (PCA) on Friday, January 23 at 2pm.

This webinar is for individuals with disabilities, their family and caregivers, as well as professionals serving the disability community. The webinar series will cover everything from eligibility criteria to beneficiary's rights through the application and appeals process.

Why does PCA matter?

PCA provides critical support to enable people with disabilities to have the assistance needed to perform daily tasks such as bathing, dressing, and eating, as well as enhance independence and dignity, ensure safety, and improve quality of life for people with disabilities.

[Register Here](#)

New Jersey Legislative Disability Caucus Webinar

The NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities
Advocate · Collaborate · Educate njcdd.org

New Jersey Legislative Disability Caucus
EMPLOYMENT FIRST IN NEW JERSEY
JAN 27 | WEBINAR @ 12PM

Employment First" in New Jersey
Tuesday, January 27, 2026
2:00pm – 1:00pm (Zoom Webinar)

[Register Here](#)

“Employment First” is a national approach and policy framework that prioritizes competitive, integrated jobs with fair wages as the primary option for individuals with disabilities. Employment First shifts the focus from segregated settings to community employment, aiming to raise expectations and change systems, so that all individuals can engage in meaningful work.

Although New Jersey is one of 14 states with the Employment First designation, barriers persist, including low participation, a lack of confidence in the capabilities of individuals with I/DD, and siloed systems with insufficient cross-agency partnerships. During the webinar, we will examine a bill to create an Employment First commission in New Jersey and highlight other Employment First initiatives from across the country. Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald, Caucus Co-Chair, will lead the webinar.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & JUSTICE FOR ADULTS WITH I/DD

Adults with I/DD face significant disparities in reproductive healthcare access, autonomy, and outcomes. This ECHO will equip providers with the knowledge and skills to deliver inclusive, respectful, person-centered care.

About the Series

Join us to explore the reproductive health needs of adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), exploring the historical context of reproductive justice as well as how to provide practical evaluations and person-centered health exams. Led by a multidisciplinary panel of healthcare providers, disability advocates, and caregivers with professional and lived experience, this series will highlight unique reproductive health needs of adults with I/DD and build skills to provide equitable and person-centered care.

Click Here to Register Now!

ECHO Launching
January 28th, 2026

Select Wednesdays
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Session Topics
To view the full list of session topics, please click [here](#).

Series Leaders
For information on our multidisciplinary team leading the sessions, click [here](#).

Continuing Education
To view the CE Accreditation for CME, CNE, CPE, and Social Work, click [here](#).

Supported by: **WITH**

Reproductive Health & Justice for Adults with I/DD

Adults with I/DD face significant disparities in reproductive healthcare access, autonomy, and outcomes. This ECHO will equip providers with the knowledge and skills to deliver inclusive, respectful, person-centered care.

Join us to explore the reproductive health needs of adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), exploring the historical context of reproductive justice as well as how to provide practical evaluations and person-centered health exams. Led by a multidisciplinary panel of healthcare providers, disability advocates, and caregivers with professional and lived experience, this series will highlight unique reproductive health needs of adults with I/DD and build skills to provide equitable and person-centered care.

[Register Here](#)

RUTGERS HEALTH
The Boggs Center
on Disability and Human Development
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

The Boggs Center offers training and consultation on topics relevant to addressing the needs of and supporting people with developmental disabilities and families across the lifecycle.

You may view and register for many of these trainings using [The Boggs Center Online Registration System](#).

Learn more about Boggs Center training and consultation opportunities:

- Aging & Grief
- Behavior & Mental Health
- Community Supports & Quality
- Community-Based Instruction
- Employment
- Meaningful Days
- PCAST - Person-Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition
- People With DD And Families
- Supports Brokerage
- Support Coordination
- Transition
- Workforce Development & Frontline Supervisors

[Learn More](#)

In the News

Department of Human Services
Office of Program Integrity & Accountability
OPIA

Highlighted Resources:
988 Suicide Helpline
NJ Register Ready
Make A Difference

Office of Program Integrity & Accountability

Home	About Us	For Individuals and Families	For Providers	Central Registry of Offenders	Provider Report Cards	Statutes, Executive Law	OPIA Data	News	Contact Us
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Visit the OPIA Website

NEW! NJ Human Services Announces Launch of Redesigned Office of Program Integrity and Accountability (OPIA) Website

New Jersey Human Services is pleased to announce the launch of the redesigned Office of Program Integrity and Accountability (OPIA) website. This update is part of Human Services' ongoing commitment to transparency, offering information in a clearer and more user-friendly format. Visitors will find expanded, easy-to-navigate content detailing OPIA's role and responsibilities, including what to expect during investigative and compliance processes, as well as insights into how the office works to protect individuals.

[Visit the OPIA Website](#)

Delivering Dignity and Opportunity: New Jersey Human Services Under Governor Murphy

Advancing Affordability, Family Success, and Inclusion

Delivering Dignity and Opportunity: New Jersey Human Services Under Governor Murphy

I am pleased to share the following [report](#), “Delivering Dignity and Opportunity: New Jersey Human Services Under Governor Murphy - *Advancing Affordability, Family Success, and Inclusion*,” which highlights eight years of accomplishments across New Jersey’s human services ecosystem on behalf of those we serve.

I am incredibly proud of what we’ve accomplished together. Our work together improved lives and strengthened New Jersey.

Thank you for your partnership.

My sincere gratitude and best wishes,
Sarah
Commissioner Sarah M. Adelman

Resources



Supports Brokers
Assisting and Empowering You to Self-Direct

Getting Started

In New Jersey, people can self-direct all or some of their Home and Community Based Services, made available through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) Supports Program or Community Care Program. Self-directed services are provided by a person you hire, known as a self-directed employee (SDE), or a service provided by a business/vendor that serves the general public, and are paid through use of a fiscal intermediary. Your Support Coordinator will work with you and, as needed, your family to help you understand what it means to self-direct by sharing information, as well as:

- Talking with you to learn about your strengths, needs, and interests, and what you want and don't want in your life
- Supporting you to describe your life goals
- Identifying different types of support that can be used to help you achieve your life goals, including DDD services, relationship-based supports (such as a family member or neighbor), community resources, technology, and other state and local service systems
- Explaining how self-directed services are different from provider-managed services, and which DDD services can be self-directed and which cannot
- Describing the role of the fiscal intermediary and the differences between the two options – Agency with Choice and Vendor Fiscal/Employer Agent
- Sharing information about the resources you use when you self-direct one or more of your services

A fiscal intermediary will be used to process payment and assigned tasks related to your approved self-directed services.

When you choose to self-direct, you can hire a Supports Broker.

Supports Brokerage is a service that is available in the DDD Supports Program and Community Care Program. Your Support Coordinator can help you to identify a Supports Brokerage agency. A **Supports Broker** can help you coordinate and maintain your self-directed services. They empower you to take control of your self-directed services, grow community connections, and direct the life you want.

Learn More

- Check out *Understanding Self-Directed Services in New Jersey* by The Boggs Center: <https://boggscenter.rutgers.edu/resources/publications/understanding-self-directed-services-in-new-jersey-and-the-role-of-the-supports-broker>
- Visit the **Office of Education on Self-Directed Services** webpage: <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/individuals/community/education/>
- Email: DDD.05509@dnj.gov

RUTGERS HEALTH
The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Division of Developmental Disabilities



RUTGERS HEALTH
The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Supports Brokers: Assisting and Empowering You to Self-Direct

In New Jersey, people can self-direct all or some of the Home and Community Based Services, made available through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) Supports Program or Community Care Program. Supports Brokers can help people who choose to self-direct to coordinate and maintain their self-directed services. The Boggs Center is excited to share **Supports Brokers: Assisting and Empowering You to Self-Direct**, a new one-page fact sheet to help people with disabilities and families better understand self-direction and the roles and responsibilities of Supports Brokers.

[Download Fact Sheet](#)



Need help with child care, child support, food assistance or cash assistance?
The Division of Family Development can help!

The New Jersey Child Support Program

helps establish and enforce child support orders, locate parents, establish paternity, and provide options for paying support.

[Learn more about Child Support](#)

Division of Family Development

The Division of Family Development (DFD) is the state agency that supervises four programs that support New Jersey Families. Use the links below to navigate to the service you are looking for.

NJ SNAP

is the food assistance program that helps low-income individuals and families buy the groceries needed to eat healthy.

[Learn more, and apply, for food assistance](#)

The Child Care Assistance Program

can help lower-income families who are working, in training or in school, or a combination of these activities to pay a portion of their child care.

[Get help paying for, or finding, childcare in NJ](#)

WFNJ

provides temporary cash assistance and many other support services through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program for families and General Assistance (GA) for single adults and couples without children.

[Learn more about WFNJ cash assistance](#)



VOTING:
IT'S YOUR RIGHT

Voting: It's Your Right

Voting: It's Your Right is a guide about voting rights and the voting process in New Jersey written in clear language for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The 7th Edition, available electronically in English and Spanish, provides readers with information on:

- Registering and preparing to vote
- Options for voting by mail and in-person
- Voting rights and accessibility
- Contacting election officials with questions

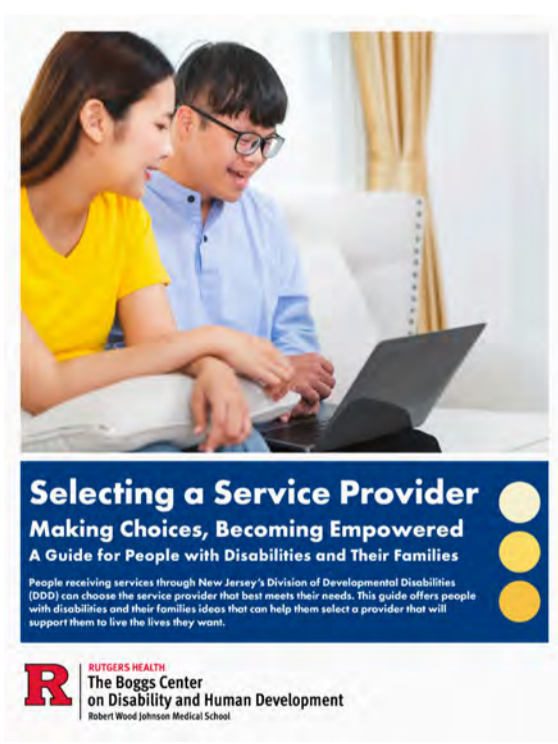
[Download guide – English](#)

[Download guide – Spanish](#)

Limited quantities are available in hard copy format through the Publications Order Form.

[Access the Order Form Here](#)

Voting: It's Your Right is also available as an [E-Learning course](#)



Selecting a Service Provider
Making Choices, Becoming Empowered
A Guide for People with Disabilities and Their Families

People receiving services through New Jersey's Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) can choose the service provider that best meets their needs. This guide offers people with disabilities and their families ideas that can help them select a provider that will support them to live the lives they want.

RUTGERS HEALTH
The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Selecting a Service Provider: Making Choices, Becoming Empowered

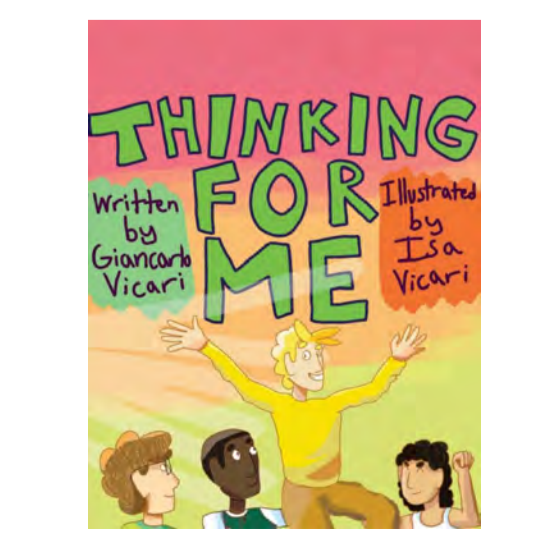
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[Download guide – English](#)

[Download guide – Spanish](#)

Limited quantities are available in hard copy format through the Publications Order Form.

[Access the Order Form Here](#)



THINKING FOR ME
Written by Giancarlo Vicari
Illustrated by Isa Vicari

Thinking for Me Comic

[Learn More](#)

Giancarlo Vicari, Youth Ambassador from New Jersey, created a comic called "Thinking for Me" about turning 18 and talking to your parents about alternatives to guardianship. We helped make Giancarlo's comic into a 5-minute audio story narrated by Giancarlo and his friends. This audio story is a great resource to share with anyone interested in learning more about supported decision-making and alternatives to guardianship!

[Download the Comic](#)



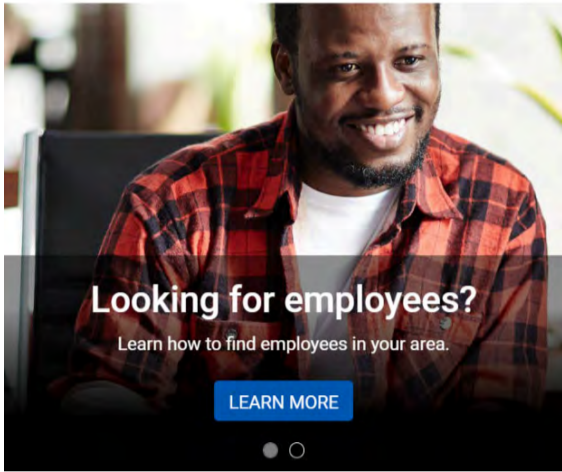
Office of the Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families

Transition Resources New Jersey State Resources

One challenge common to every individual with an intellectual or developmental disability and their families is the transition from childhood to adulthood. Known as the proverbial "cliff" – the point at which there seems to be a sudden drop in services and supports as children age out of the school system and into adult life. Below are resources to help with this transition.

[Learn More](#)

Jobs that Care New Jersey



Looking for employees?

Learn how to find employees in your area.

[LEARN MORE](#)

The Direct Care and Service Workforce is critical to the lives of people with disabilities and those who are aging. The demand for these jobs is growing fast and will continue to increase in years to come. This workforce is essential to providing the supports individuals need to live healthy, active, and engaged lives in the community. From helping with personal, health, and home care to providing support with community activities, workers in these roles make a difference!

If you are interested pursuing a rewarding career, please check out the information on this site to learn more and to find jobs in your area.

[Learn More](#)



Employment First

The Employment First page on the NJCDD website has been updated with information intended for individuals living with disabilities who are interested in working!

Now, along with information about Employment First in New Jersey, the page features plain language information and links related to:

- [Seeking Employment](#)
- [Benefit Resources](#) as they relate to work
- [Transitioning to employment](#) from high school

[Learn More](#)

**DISABILITY BENEFITS 101
NEW JERSEY**
[HTTPS://NJ.DB101.ORG](https://nj.db101.org)
+ FIND THE RIGHT HEALTH COVERAGE FOR YOU
+ BENEFITS AND WORK ESTIMATOR
+ LEARN ABOUT SSI & SSDI BENEFITS, AND MORE!



**BENEFICIOS POR DISCAPACIDAD 101
NUEVA JERSEY**
[HTTPS://NJ.DB101.ORG](https://nj.db101.org)
+ ENCUENTRE EL SEGURO MÉDICO A SU MEDIDA
+ ESTIMADOR DE BENEFICIOS Y TRABAJO
+ CONOZCA LOS BENEFICIOS DE SSI Y SSDI, ¡Y MÁS!

The NJCDD is proud to support NJ DB101, a free, user-friendly, all-in-one place, resource guide for employment and benefit questions/information. Find out how working impacts benefits like SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, and more! Resources are in plain language and available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

[Learn More](#)

An Enhanced Family Support Crisis Handbook 4th Edition

Available in English and Spanish



Enhanced Family Crisis Handbook

The purpose of this expanded version of the Toolkit is to empower individuals with disabilities and their family and professional caregivers by providing information to more effectively advocate for persons with complex severe behavioral health conditions (which we formerly referred to as “dual diagnosis”) for treatments, supports, services and the conditions that promote mental wellness.

[Learn More](#)

Manual Mejorado de Crisis Familiares

El propósito de esta versión ampliada del kit de herramientas es facilitarles a las personas que tienen discapacidades y a sus cuidadores familiares y profesionales herramientas que los empoderen, al proveer información que permita abogar de una forma más efectiva por las personas que tienen condiciones graves y complejas de salud conductual (a las que antes se denominaban con “diagnóstico dual”) para conseguir los tratamientos, apoyos, servicios y las condiciones que fomentan el bienestar mental.

[Aprende Más](#)



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Telephone: 1-800-792-8858 | Email: njcdd@njcdd.org

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