

**Appropriations Committee Hearing - February 18, 2016**

**Testimony from Michael Zboray**

**House Bill No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

**Privatization of Group Homes due to Budget Cuts**

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before your Committee. My name is Michael Zboray and I am here to speak for my brother, Richard Zboray, who cannot speak for himself. My brother is one of the many residents of group homes that have been targeted by the Governor for privatization to save money.

This quote embodies the negative impact of this decision.

“The Governor’s decision to privatize these group homes is a terrible idea that will have life-altering consequences for some of the state’s most vulnerable residents. For many of these people, the workers who staff these facilities are really the only family they’ve known – some for decades. For people who struggle with disabilities, the disappearance of the few people they know, are comfortable with, and can count on to take care of them will do irreparable harm”. That quote was given in 2009 by then Mayor Dannel Malloy in reference to Governor Rell’s proposal to privatize state group homes.

So what makes this a good idea now?

DDS states on their website that a key component of the DDS mission includes the vision statement that “individuals know their rights and responsibilities and pursue opportunities to live the life they choose.”

“People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have the same basic legal, civil and human rights as other citizens. All individuals regardless of ability need the opportunity to effectively advocate for themselves and to exercise their rights. All citizens should understand their rights and be able to have the same opportunities as everyone else. Basic rights such as *where to live and with whom, having control and responsibility for our finances, the right to work, the right to have relationships of our choice, the right to choose how and where we spend our time, and the right to be treated equally, with dignity and respect, are all basic human rights that all people, regardless of ability, should experience.*”

This current privatization proposal is completely contrary to DDS’ very own mission statement on how to care for our state’s disabled.

Dr. Kerins, the specialist who diagnosed Rick with Alzheimer's this past summer, has recommended that the staff continue "to provide structure and continuity in his routine". Furthermore, a MARC behavioral assessment found that, "at baseline, Rick is highly vulnerable to changes in his life. He consistently seeks to maintain order, familiarity and consistency with his life. Use "Proactive procedures", including trying to establish and keep a consistent daily routine with Rick and Rick is likely to respond best (emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally) within an environment that is quiet, free from distractions, contains few peers and is familiar. "It is important to keep a consistent routine with him". Take from this that "familiar" is the operative word. Any change is detrimental to his mental well-being.

Ladies and gentlemen, think about the situation from this standpoint, you leave for work one day and your family is replaced by a new one. You will never see the people you spent every day with and loved ever again. Your new family are loving, kind and respectful people, but they ARE NOT your family!

Furthermore, in this hypothetical example, you can articulate your emotions clearly and eloquently to try to effect a remedy. These innocent, compromised people have no voice. They have no way to speak to the fear and anxiety they feel when faced with the possibility of total strangers taking control of their lives. Therefore, we must speak for them.

I understand that you are in a difficult position and you have many hard choices ahead of you with the current budget. But I urge you to please have the courage to do the right thing. Please stand up for these vulnerable, defenseless people and defend them against this "life-altering" proposal, as Governor Malloy described it in 2009. It was a "life-altering" proposal in 2009 and it is in 2016 as well. I encourage you to listen to the voices of family and guardians, like me, who know this proposal will have terrible effects on our loved ones. Please do not support House Bill No. 5044 and please look elsewhere to solve the budget problem that has, in no way, been created by these individuals with disabilities.

I have attached with my testimony a copy of my letter to Governor Malloy for your review as well.

**Michael Zboray**  
**79 Long Hill Rd**  
**Gray, Maine 04039**  
**207-831-0620**  
**mzboray1@maine.rr.com**

January 18, 2016

Governor Dannel Malloy  
Capitol Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Malloy:

I am writing to request that you cancel the planned transition of my brother's group home at Waterford Commons in Manchester from state run to private run. This process will devastate him. He was born with Down Syndrome and mental retardation. He was just diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease this past summer. He can't manage change at this point and has no good way to express his feelings except for tears or anger.

I am seriously worried that if he loses all the "trusted support" he has known for the better part of his life, he will end up in a place for "troubled, violent people". He is not a violent person by nature. His ability to articulate his feelings is so limited that he can only act out in frustration when things scare or confuse him. Again, his only way to show frustration/fear is to cry or get mad. That is why I am speaking for him as his brother and guardian.

My brother, Richard Zboray, has lived in the same group home with the same staff and the same roommates for 37 years. He deserves to go into his last years of life in the same safe, loving and familiar place, with the same trusted people that have become his family over the decades. Two of his roommates have been through so much conflict and turbulence in their lives before coming to this home, where they have melded together into one family unit. Surely you can find some other way to save money in your budget that won't adversely affect so many compromised, fragile people who need consistency and familiarity in their lives to feel safe.

Please, I am begging you to reconsider this terrible injustice being perpetuated upon so many innocent people who have no way to object on their own. Certainly in a budget as large as the state has, you can find this small amount of savings somewhere less harmful to fragile, compromised people. Under the circumstances, this seems an appropriate request.

The process has started and once done, cannot be undone. Once the staff he knows is moved out, they will not be able to return after the privatization. The damage will have been done. Please talk to Commissioner Murray and tell her to cancel this action immediately.

Thank you for reconsidering this important matter.

Sincerely,

Michael Zboray  
Brother and Guardian of Richard Zboray