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POSITION PAPER ON RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

For nearly a decade, there has been a serious lack of new residential development and virtually no self-directed housing for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) who need 24-hour care. In Westchester County alone, there are now over **600** individuals on the Residential Request List (RRL) with more than **100** of them on the Certified Residential Opportunity (CRO) list. The CRO list includes individuals who are currently working with OPWDD and presumably have the highest priority needs. We believe that only about **16** new certified placements were created this fiscal year with most coming from residential schools or facilities. Any other placements were from backfills, for example when residents died. **80% of recent placements have been from the CRO Emergency Need Category. Due to funding issues, we are not aware of any self-directed housing situations created for individuals requiring overnight "awake" staff. This discriminates against the individuals who have the greatest needs because they just don't fit OPWDD's unrealistic budgets.**

There reportedly are over 200 open residential spaces in Hudson Valley group homes/assisted apartments. However, many openings are inappropriate for individuals on the waitlist. For example, a volatile individual with a criminal background cannot be placed in a supportive apartment with limited supervision. Filling these vacancies is complicated because transferring long-time individuals to different group homes to maximize appropriate placements may, in many cases, be traumatic. **Even if all of these open beds were filled, it would only address the Emergency Need category of the CRO list. Many families still would be in dire straits waiting for a safe and appropriate home for their loved ones.**

We were pleased that the legislature asked OPWDD to do a detailed survey and report on the RRL in 2016. It was represented as a comprehensive study of I/DD housing needs, but in our opinion it vastly undercounted the individuals because of its reliance on the NYS Cares List and other issues. However, the report and various useful Transformation Panel/ Regional Stakeholder reports quantified the significance of this dire situation:

- **29%** of individuals are 40 years old or older on the RRL with 46% of their caregivers over age 60. Many of these individuals have waited a long time for an appropriate placement and likely will require emergency placements in the future given that 61% of the caregivers report issues (health, stress-related or other) that make it hard to provide care.

- 70% of individuals (on average) need the care overnight (24/7) of awake staff and more intensive care due to health or behavioral issues. From our observation, these situations are difficult, if not impossible to fiscally implement using a self-directed approach under current funding mechanisms. Some type of 24/7 settings certified or self-directed, with extensive supports, will be required for these individuals.
- One size does not fit all, given the wide variety of health and behavioral issues. Some individuals are capable and want to self-direct their housing. However, **60% of RRL respondents wanted traditional agency-staffed residences, probably due in part to the frequent need for 24-hour direct care for safety reasons.**

OPWDD budgeted an additional \$110 million during FY17 for services for individuals with developmental disabilities living at home. **At least in Westchester County, we are aware of only 1 house that has been created to handle the extensive waitlist where the individuals did not come from residential schools or facilities.**

GROW was happy to be part of a Region 3 Stakeholder Advisory Group to create additional housing opportunities with a FY 17 budget of \$1.8 million. The result of this effort in the Hudson Valley is the provision of apartments for 4 individuals in the Hudson Valley with the goal to encourage independent living. We applaud this effort. **However, providing 1 house with 4 individuals in a very populated 4 county area is a pilot effort and needs to be greatly expanded to have any impact on the wait list.**

Key Recommendations

- Communicate to all RRL caregivers and individuals how the CRO process works and clear up any misconceptions about the RRL and CRO lists.
- Regional stakeholders and advocates need to see quarterly how the RRL and CRO list are changing and a summary of any new development or realignment of housing resources that occurs.
- A five-year specific and comprehensive housing plan is badly needed to address the unique needs and challenges of more than 11,000 individuals who will eventually need housing. This plan needs to be **funded** in future budgets.
- Creative solutions are needed to pair compatible individuals together in new development. This is especially needed with individuals who have more intensive medical, mobility or behavioral needs that do not lend themselves to a self-directed solution.