

Testimony from Robert J. Colombo to Finance Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services

My name is Bob Colombo and I am the father and legal guardian, along with my wife, of Elizabeth (Lizzie) Colombo who is now 26 year old physically but is only 3 years old mentally and without the ability to communicate verbally or through sign language. She currently resides at Flat Rock Care Center, an ICF, along with approximately 34 others.

Shortly after Lizzie was born we knew she was not 'normal'. My wife graciously made the decision to stay home with her full-time rather than continuing to work. It was our intention to take care of our daughter indefinitely. However it became obvious in her teens that we needed help as she was physically bigger than my wife and had outbursts of physical aggression. We turned to our county board (Medina County) for assistance. We put our names on the wait list for a waiver home and was offered respite care in our house. We took advantage of the respite care but quickly learned that some of the care providers were not as good as others. Also we came to the conclusion that this was not the answer and the waiver home wait would be long. We asked what other options were available but not given any other options. We were never told about an ICF option.

During a phone call with the Neurologist's assistant, expressing our frustrations and lack of quality providers, it was suggested we look at Flat Rock Care Center. We were not sure what that was at the time but pursued it. Eventually we came to understand that it was an ICF. After several visits, some with Lizzie, we decided to go on their waiting list. Again we were told that the wait could be a couple of years. Less than a year later we received the call saying there was room for Lizzie. This was earlier than expected and it was heart wrenching decision but we entered her into the ICF. This was also about 2 years after we started talking with the county. Now, some 10 years later, we see it was the best decision we could have made for her. She has built relationships there – something we never saw at home with the other children in neighborhood and never thought possible. When we go to Flat Rock to bring Lizzie home for a weekend visit, something we do every other weekend, she goes over to her roommate and sits beside her like she is saying goodbye. Her roommate upon Lizzie's return once got so excited she started yelling 'Yah Lizzie's back, Lizzie's back' repeatedly.

Lizzie has also advanced some of her life skills such as being able to get a glass and help herself to water – something we were not able to accomplish at home. Flat Rock makes certain she gets out into the community as well by taking her to stores where they help her shop, visiting lighthouses and animal farms along with other activities.

I ask you to please include the amendment that will ensure parents are told about all their options from the beginning. An ICF is right for Lizzie but not right for everyone. We were not told about the ICF option and believe there are many families today that are not aware of all

the options available causing undo stress and harm. All options should be presented so that those who know the person best can make an informed decision.

