

My name is Tom Gilbert. I have spent the better part of the last 45+ years in the field of Developmental Disabilities in institutional and group home settings. I currently work at Northeast Care Center in North Royalton, Ohio just south of Cleveland. I am an activity specialist. My job is designing, coordinating, and participating in community outings for all of the 48 individuals who reside in the ICF/IID Alpha Complex at Northeast Care Center. All of the individuals we serve actively participate in community excursions very regularly.

Since October we have attended Community Rec facilities, The West Side Market, Libraries, Bowling Lanes, Flea markets, Churches, Lectures, Sporting events, Swimming pools, The Metro Zoo, Nature Centers, Skatelands, Dollar Stores, Cinemas, The Cleveland APL, Green houses, Malls, Coffee shops, bookstores, Museums, Concerts, high schools, parks, recycling centers, Fire department tours, etc., etc.

The adult clients from the homes all have multiple diagnoses; for instance, autism, paraplegia, dysphagia, non-verbal, Down syndrome, Cerebral palsy, seizure disorder, etc, and fall into the ranges of Severely to Profoundly Intellectually Disabled. Many of our individuals use wheelchairs for mobility. Due to our individuals having very complex medical needs, our community excursions require that we travel like Bedouins, making sure we take with us all of the necessary materials and provisions at our disposal, wherever we go, to ensure that health and safety of all of the individuals are never compromised. We have to be very aware of their individual medical, medicinal, dietary, behavioral, orthopedic, speech, and psychological needs at all times, while providing them with the most enjoyable, refreshing, and participatory experiences whenever and wherever we go out. Many of the individuals, for behavioral or orthopedic circumstances, require one on one attention while in the community. These accommodations (staffing and vehicles) would not be fiscally possible under the proposed waiver budgets.

There is an opening statement by DRO (Disability Rights of Ohio), a quotation, in their published piece, "Community Integration: Changing Ohio's Developmental Disabilities System", and it is this: "For years Disabilities Rights Ohio (DRO) has heard from many people with

developmental disabilities and their families that Ohio's system does not give them opportunities to live, work and spend time in their communities.”

Our individuals at the Alpha Complex do live in the community of North Royalton, and are citizens there. They shop there, attend church there, and they attend day programs there. Some of them vote there in the regular elections. Few of them are gainfully employed there, but they are being prepared for work with volunteering opportunities in several places in the local area around North Royalton. Work for pay is a goal that we are still trying to address.

Some now attend Workshop Activity Centers in various surrounding communities (Brooklyn, Parma, Seven Hills), as regular work in the general common market place for individuals who are labeled disabled is still extremely rare even today, because private companies or corporations are not mandated by law to hire folks who are physically and intellectually handicapped. They are only required by law to give equal opportunity to hire those who have the capabilities of performing the jobs under consideration.

Almost all of our individuals are illiterate (unable to read) and have never throughout their lives been afforded the opportunities to learn to read. The highest correlation to unemployment in the general population is in fact illiteracy.

The proposition of closing all workshops and day programs, which are now very functional and enjoyable places for all of these persons, will not in and of itself necessarily produce the opening or availability of alternative work placements and daily activities elsewhere in the community for those who would be displaced.

The individuals who live at the 3 separate Alpha dwellings have tremendous physical, medical, orthopedic, and behavioral needs that are being met very satisfactorily under the current ICF system. These guardians and individuals are all pleased with the services they receive and these guardians are very wary of any proposed change where such care and diligence may not be afforded them in the future.

I have two old applicable adages to share with you here: “One size does not fit all,” and “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.”

Please consider that all guardians and individuals today, under person centered planning who choose no longer to participate in an ICF program can opt out now, and do so and be provided with waivers, if the slots are available. There are no restrictions here. But those who choose to have a choice for ICF care should not be denied that opportunity of the ICF if they, as guardians, determine that a large ICF is the better suited placement considering the individual's personal needs.

The Alpha units with their supporting cast of therapists and specialists also regularly serve clients within Northeast Care Center's waiver homes and smaller ICFs who demonstrate needs that are not met with the efficacy and immediacy that they require. Closing this ICF would end that.

We at the Alphas are providing a continuum of care for all of the individuals whom we serve. When the Alphas opened, in the late 1970s, we received all of our new admissions from the large state institutions. Our directives then were to prepare our clients for the next less restrictive environment, appropriate for their ongoing and sometimes declining health conditions.

I believe there will be a continuing need for the valuable services our Alpha units provide. We will continue to provide care for those with complex physical and behavioral needs.

I hereby request that the language cited on page 1774 lines 54879 through 54882 of the state proposed budget be removed.

This specific item requires that large ICF beds be closed after an individual leaves who becomes enrolled in the Medicaid Waiver system.

This specific language affects the continuum of care and discourages providers from helping individuals move to a less restrictive setting.

Here is the potential of this aspect of the ruling:

There are fixed costs in operating an ICF that would remain the same when clients would leave, and those beds would remain empty, under this ruling. In turn, the rates for the remaining individuals would necessarily increase in order to compensate. These increases would then push the remaining individuals' rates above the state arranged average rate ceilings for which the providers like Northeast Care center would not be compensated.

The potential consequences of this statewide ruling would be untenable, and would fiscally force large ICFs out of business.

I invite all of you to come to our facility in North Royalton and directly witness what we do to provide care and services for all whom we serve.