

House Committee on Finance  
Testimony of Theresa Schneckler  
Social Worker at Brookside Extended Care  
April 16, 2015

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Driehaus, my name is Theresa Schneckler. I am a Licensed Social Worker in the State of Ohio. I currently work for Brookside Extended Care, a 108 bed ICF-IID in Warren County Ohio. As the social worker in an ICF-IID, I receive referrals for individuals looking for placement. Earlier this month, the mother of a man with intellectual disabilities stopped by Brookside inquiring about placement for her son. She appeared tired, anxious, overwhelmed, and afraid. Her son is in his 40s. He has lived in several group homes and each time has ended up back at home. The mother believes that a larger facility would offer her son the services that he requires. She does not live in Ohio but is looking for out of state placement due to limited options where she lives. Her state only offers small community settings and that will not work for her son. This is the second referral I have received in the past month from families looking to move to Ohio for services. There has been a lot of discussion about what other states are doing. Why do we assume that other states are doing it better? Maybe it is Ohio that is doing it right. Some states have gone down the same path that has been proposed for Ohio only to discover the flaws. What kind of state do we want Ohio to be? Do we want Ohio to be a state where we provide choices for those needing services, and listen to the needs of the families or do we want to be a state that makes choices for families, out of fear of litigation no matter the consequences?

Brookside is currently in the process of downsizing by moving 48 residents out of the large facility and into six, eight bed ICFs. The plan is for Brookside to be down to 60 beds by 2017. For over a year, we have been talking to our families about the smaller facilities that have private bedrooms, private bathrooms, and a kitchen where they can prepare and share a meal with their loved ones. After discussing all the amenities that come with these brand new homes, only two guardians out of 108 were interested in moving their loved ones. By the end of May, the first group of residents from phase one of our downsizing plan will be moving. All but one have APSI as their guardian. While only two residents' families have agreed to move,

we have had multiple families calling concerned, seeking reassurance that they will not be forced to move. They prefer the larger ICF, even with 4 residents per room. We will be facing a dilemma when the next two homes are completed and none of our existing residents are interested in moving. Millions of dollars are being spent on smaller community settings that the families of individuals living in large ICFs have no interest in. DODD has said that people will not be forced to give up services that they are happy with; however, each year Brookside's capacity is being reduced by 16 beds and we do not have 16 residents willing to move. It puts professionals like me in a difficult position. I do not want to have to make the decision on who stays and who goes. What happens when a family's fears become reality and their loved one's health starts to decline and the services they need are no longer available? Families have a right to make choices in the best interest of their family member. What happens when the facility that has kept their loved one safe, happy, and healthy is being taken away and no comparable option is being offered in its place? In the past, families would reach out to DRO to advocate on their behalf. Ironically, it is DRO asking for families to be put in this situation by taking away their options. DRO's Executive Director testified that "we (DRO) envision a society in which people with disabilities make decisions about where, how and with whom they will live, learn, work and play". Yet, the proposed legislation moves the system towards the elimination of ICFs; clearly the choice many people prefer. Many of our current residents received waiver services in the past and the smaller community settings could not meet their complex needs. Parents are being forced to return to a system they know from experience will not work for their children.

DRO argues that residents of ICFs are institutionalized and segregated from their community. I disagree. What is a community? It is defined as "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common, a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals."

Based on the definition of "community," the residents at Brookside live in a community. They live in a community where they come in contact with over a hundred people everyday. They live in a community where their needs are met, they are cared for, and they

are loved. They live in a community where they do not have to worry if there's an emergency. There is a nurse in the building 24 hours a day. They live in a community where they go to the mall, the movies, concerts, sporting events, the same places you and I go. Our residents even have Reds' season tickets. Residents regularly go to family reunions and family holiday celebrations. Some of our residents meet their families at church every week. The residents at Brookside live in a community where they are loved, interacted with, laughed with, cried with, cared for, and grieved for when they are gone.

As I thought about what to include in my testimony, I found myself filtering my thoughts. There was an internal struggle between what I needed to say and the fear of saying it out loud. I thought about what the consequences might be to me personally for speaking out against this. Could I lose my job? Unfortunately, fear is the driving force behind many of the decisions that are being made and many people's unwillingness to speak up. I have spoken with professionals who do not agree with the proposals being made but cannot speak out publicly due to the conflict of interest it creates and fear of losing their job. How many APSI guardians, SSAs, and other DODD employees have not spoken up because as state employees their hands are tied. Recently an individual within the ICF-IID provider association stated "if we fight this too hard, the result might be worse than what we're dealing with now." Doesn't this sound as though this person was stating, the fight is not based on what is right but is based on fear of consequences?

You have the power to decide what type of fear is going to win out in the end. Don't let fear stand in the way of doing what is right. Think about the very real fears families have when losing the services they have come to count on. As our State Representatives, think of the thousands of individuals with disabilities who will be personally affected and make the right decision for them.