

Testimony by Barbara P. Fox (barbfox121@gmail.com or 213.647.7220)

Mother & Legal Guardian of Kevin Fox, age 19 and resident of an ICF in South Euclid, Cuyahoga County

November 30, 2020

My 19-year-old son Kevin has lived in a 6-bed Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) in a lovely neighborhood in South Euclid for 4 years. He has daily seizures, is non-verbal, mentally retarded, and has severe autism. Despite all these disabilities, he recognizes me as “mom” and jumps up and smiles whenever I enter the room. Before March 2020, he went to school every weekday from 8:30am-3:00 pm and came home to my house every Saturday night to Sunday morning. The group home is a good place for him to sleep safely with supervision, receive medicines, get bathed and receive food, but it was never designed to be a place to live 24/7. Because of COVID-19 and ODDD restrictions, the residents are forced to remain in the house 24/7 with no visitors allowed in for the last 8 months.

In the first 6 weeks of the shutdown, my son lost a lot of weight. He is 5’6” and was reduced to 98 pounds. This is considered malnutrition and is medically dangerous. Even after much effort to get him to eat, he remains at 98 pounds. All medical causes have been ruled out, so we can only surmise that with a non-verbal child, this is his way of showing emotional or psychological distress. Distress? He is not allowed to attend school each weekday, weekend visits home are not permitted and he is limited to the four walls of the house with a revolving door of different caregivers, some who know nothing about him. This is not a criticism of the group home, but the reality of staffing \$12/hour positions during a pandemic. In his distress, he is not allowed regular visits from his mom. These residents should be allowed indoor weekly or twice a week visits from their loved ones. To deny these visits or to impose severe restrictions on visits (ex. Plexiglass barrier or outdoor visits in 30-degree weather) increases the distress of these most vulnerable individuals.

As loved ones, we understand the intent behind the restrictions. We want to protect the lives of all residents, but we want those residents to have *quality of life*. We are willing to wear masks, keep 6 feet distance, hand sanitize galore, take temperature checks, stay in the bedroom, open the window, wear gloves, and avoid using the restroom. We are desperate to see our loved ones! Please support HB 770 to protect and encourage the thousands of distressed Ohioans who live in these residential facilities.