

March 8, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of Section 2 of LD 2243

My name is Holly Randall and I reside in Lisbon Falls. I retired in August 2022 from Independence Association following a 32-year career at this highly regarded agency that has supported adults and children with intellectual disabilities across a multitude of programs for more than 50 years. Since my retirement I have had the pleasure of staying in contact with many of the individuals I had the privilege of supporting to pursue quality lives in their communities of choice.

I submit testimony today because of my concern for six residents who reside at Independence Association's residential PNMI Program (Section 97 Appendix F) on School Street in Freeport. Independence House, as it is known, originally opened in 1978 on neighboring Park Street. It was a two-story older home with three shared bedrooms that was not accessible. In the mid 1990's, Independence Association was able to build an addition on the home utilizing HUD funding to ensure single bedrooms for everyone, and first floor accessibility. In 2005, the Ramada Inn built a new hotel on Park Street. In need of additional space for parking, the Ramada purchased the Independence House property and, in a partnership with HUD and Independence Association, helped to build a new, state of the art, fully accessible home on School Street for Independence House. Residents had input into the layout and decoration of the home, which was specifically developed with an accessible, age in place design/vision.

These residents are now at risk of having to move from their home, a home that many of them have lived in for more than 25 years. All residents are over the age of 60. All residents consider Freeport their community of choice. All residents consider themselves friends, even family. Four of the six residents have held paid jobs in the community. Many of them attend First Parash church each Sunday and are inclusive members of the congregation. The home is centrally located in the downtown area which affords walking access to amenities they enjoy. The accessible design meets the increasing mobility, medical and aging needs of the individuals who live there.

So why are these residents at risk of losing their home? They are at risk because the PNMI funding mechanism (Section 97 Appendix F) does not adequately cover

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the costs for them to live there. It is an antiquated, obsolete program that has been stripped of funding add-ons (special circumstance dollars as one example) which has resulted in losses in excess of \$50,000 annually over the past 7 years. In addition, cost reports reflect that Independence Association is still owed \$170,000 because they have not yet been reconciled by the Department of Audit.

Mission over margin, while commendable, is no longer sustainable. And, as a result, Independence Association has had to make a most difficult decision to serve notice to these six residents, and their family members / guardians, that they can no longer support operation of the PNMI (Section 97) Program. This has created anxiety and fear for everyone.

An anxiety and fear that are completely unnecessary. Unnecessary why? Because these six residents all qualify for a different funding mechanism that would allow them to stay where they are. A funding mechanism that was recognized as necessary for them many years ago, and that these six residents have been on waiting list to receive but been denied - the Section 21 Waiver.

Independence Association has no plans to “close” Independence House (which is the rumor), but instead plans to continue to operate this residence as a Section 21 Waiver Home. The Agency **wants nothing more than to continue to serve these individuals in their current home and community of choice**. The solution isn't complicated or difficult. The Office of Aging and Disability Services needs simply to convert their funding from the PNMI (Section 97) Program to the Waiver 21 Program – a program for which they qualify and have been on the wait list for years. What is it going to take to make this happen so as to relieve the anxiety and fear of these residents and their family members/guardians? What is it going to take for OADS to do the right thing?

Respectfully submitted,

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LD 2243

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These residents are now at risk of having to move from their home, a home that many of them have lived in for more than 25 years. All residents are over the age of 60. All residents consider Freeport their community of choice. All residents consider themselves friends, even family. Four of the six residents have held paid jobs in the community. Many of them attend First Parash church each Sunday and are inclusive members of the congregation. The home is centrally located in the downtown area which affords walking access to amenities they enjoy. The accessible design meets the increasing mobility, medical and aging needs of the individuals who live there. So why are these residents at risk of losing their home? They are at risk because the PNMI funding mechanism (Section 97 Appendix F) does not adequately cover the costs for them to live there. It is an antiquated, obsolete program that has been stripped of funding add-ons (special circumstance dollars as one example) which has resulted in losses in excess of \$50,000 annually over the past 7 years. In addition, cost reports reflect that Independence Association is still owed \$170,000 because they have not yet been reconciled by the Department of Audit.

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