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Augusta

LD 716 An Act to Enhance and Improve the ME Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board and to Establish the Aging and Disability Mortality Review Panel

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee:

I am the parent of a 53-year-old woman in a waiver home. Previously, she lived at Pineland, in 3 previous group homes in North Windham and in the Waterville area, as well as at home and at a State facility in El Paso, Texas. El Paso was used as a relocation point for military families with special needs children, one of the reasons I still have contacts with families in other states.

I also knew many parents whose people were at Pineland as well. And I served on the CAB.

One thing I have learned is that we rarely stop worrying about our children, no matter their age. We also worry about their care if they are not at home, our needs if they are, and a million other things. A board such as this one that works with the State offices but is not staffed by employees of the State helps give parents and guardians, as well as self advocates another source to talk with without worrying about the effects on their person's care. I have no complaints about my daughter's current care, but I do think this board has a stabilizing effect for the system as well as added strength and support if things begin to slide due to other pressures.

Adding the Aging and Disability Mortality Review Panel is another confidence builder for outsiders as well as a way to identify any slippage in safety or in staffing. It also may be able to help families who have a difficult time understanding their person's death. Most importantly, it can identify the dangers, whether it is staff having to work too many hours, some simple safety check that has been forgotten, or that limited staffing has become so common that clients are uneasy and new faces are stressed by the unexpected.

None of this is for finger pointing. It is for calmly making life better for both staff and clients. Identifying corners that have been cut a bit too much may be able to teach us all of its value. The results will not be "pampering" but successful growth for all. The minute I have seen people trying to cover up shortfalls they can't control but are afraid they will be blamed for, I know there's trouble. I hope we have grown to the point of working together to earn trust rather than having fear or guilt. None of us is perfect. There is so much we have to learn. Doing it positively and honestly may even make it more economical. And people can enjoy their jobs knowing they are capable and also have others backing them up.

Please give this group the backing they need to help our system be able to function and grow. Amazing things may happen.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for taking on your difficult job in this Legislature.

Darla Stimpson Chafin