

To the Virginia House of Delegates, January 26, 2016

Good afternoon. I am Sharon Stroble, Regional Director with Wall Residences. Before I begin, please let me share that we appreciate your service to the Commonwealth and the wisdom and leadership you are bringing to Virginia's policymaking during this time of change. Your support of additional Waiver slots is noticed. Thank you. With some adjustments, the redesign of the waiver is exciting and will be beneficial to many Virginians with disabilities.

I have come to speak to you today to alert you to what we believe is an oversight in the Waiver Redesign. As currently proposed, Sponsored Residential Services (referred to as Sponsored Placement in the Burns and Associates document), are to receive a significant reduction of funding compared to a larger group home setting. We believe that this is a mistake in policy. Burns and Associates recommended a significant cut in reimbursement for the Sponsored Residential service model in their proposal, we speculate, because they did not understand the model and they did not get enough data in Virginia to reach an informed conclusion.

For those of you who are not aware, sponsored residential services are services provided in the licensed home of a contracted professional family. These services provide support to only one or two individuals in the home, which allows for a very intensive and individualized service. All workers in these environments are trained and certified professionals who are required to maintain documentation of services according to Medicaid standards. Many who were unsuccessful in group home arrangements, thrive due to the continuity of care and steady relationships that develop with family they live with. This model offers consistency, and the security that comes from the individual knowing who will be there night and day for help when needed. Changes in the person who receives services health and behavior may be more quickly identified and reported for earlier intervention.

Since implementation in 1991, when the Waiver program began in Virginia, Sponsored Residential has been treated the same as the group home model in terms of regulatory requirements, expected outcomes, and reimbursement rates. This model continues to be a highly regulated professional service, supporting individuals with significant support needs. These are not just words, statistics identify that Sponsored Residential service providers support proportionately more individuals assessed at the highest level of need including significant medical and behavioral needs in Virginia than those who are supported in group homes. These individuals are referred to as Tier 3 or 4 in the Waiver redesign documents. Individuals requiring the highest levels of support, and those in need of the most complex care, are often served in a sponsored model, because it is designed to be more individualized.

Throughout the Waiver redesign process there has been a focus on moving individuals from larger, more restrictive settings to settings that are smaller and more individualized. This is a federal mandate we support. The Sponsored Residential model currently in place is one of the smallest, most inclusive, normalized service models available. It offers an intensive, flexible way to support people with difficult behaviors, extensive medical needs, including feeding tubes, those with Autism, or physical disabilities and /or those with a serious long term mental illness. Shift based settings can have difficulty meeting the full needs of these specialized populations. Even those with fewer identified support needs, when offered a choice, will choose a Sponsored Residential service, because in this model there can be more flexibility offered in terms of leisure and meaningful day activity.

Burns and Associates justify the reimbursement rate suggested for the “Sponsored Placement” model, by using other states as evidence that family providers should be paid at a lower rate. We do not agree with their assumptions.

Professional, contracted, family providers incur very similar expenses to run their services as are incurred in group home service models. Out of their payments for services the contracted family provider is responsible to cover the costs of their own health insurance, retirement planning and increases in insurance costs. They are also covering most of the costs of maintaining housing and transportation for the service.

The agencies that provide oversight to the contracted family provider such as Wall Residences, Lutheran Family Services, several Community Services Boards and many others, provide 24-7 on call emergency support to provider families. Recruitment, training, licensing, oversight of services and ensuring that services are delivered in regulatory compliance is on-going. Sponsored Residential agencies are mandated to comply with requirements with electronic health records and to carry professional liability insurance on service sites. Since they serve 1-2 people per site, the administrative cost is actually higher than it is for larger congregate settings.

The Sponsored Residential model recruits, trains and supervises providers who are registered nurses, retired teachers, social workers, pastors, and many who have left state training centers to offer person centered services in their own homes. Their professional expertise makes a difference in their own life and that of the person they support. This professional workforce is not attracted to employment in a shift based group home.

We are asking for an adjustment of the “home payment” and “admin” line items for sponsored placement in the Burns and Associate proposal. This will restore rate parity with the 4 bed group home rate for serving this same individual.

Virginia has created a sponsored residential service model which is delivered in a professional and safe manner to our most vulnerable citizens. It is our belief that “Virginia does Sponsored Residential better”. This is an accomplishment to be proud of and not devalued by an outside consulting firm that never took the time to understand how this model is different before comparing us to other states.

More than 1,200 Virginian’s with disabilities have made Sponsored Residential their choice of residential services for the ID Waiver. They and their families are depending on the system to ensure that the services they have chosen for themselves or their loved ones, are protected so that they may continue.

Failure to restore Sponsored Residential Rates to parity with 4 bed group homes will impact the ability of agencies to recruit new contracted providers. As more people leave training centers and more Waiver slots are assigned to community members, we need to develop more services, not less.

Your help is needed. Please join us in advocating for Parity of Rates for Sponsored Residential services to the 4 bed group home model.

Virginia does it better!

I would be happy to provide additional information, whenever you have time. Please contact me.

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We are available to review this with you in greater detail as time permits and I thank you for the chance to provide this information.