

March 4, 2013

Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Levinson,

I write to you today to request that you undertake an immediate investigation into the alarming number of deaths and cases of abuse of developmentally disabled individuals in group homes. In particular, I would like you to focus on the prevalence of preventable deaths at privately run group homes across this nation and the widespread privatization of our delivery system. As you know, much of the cost for taking care of the developmentally disabled is borne by Medicaid. Therefore, there is a significant federal responsibility for making sure that these individuals are taken care of in a safe and compassionate setting.

A recent series by the *Hartford Courant* has raised some serious concerns in my home state and there have been similar articles in recent years in states like Virginia, New York, Massachusetts, Louisiana and Texas. Unfortunately, from 2004-2010, there have been 76 deaths of developmentally disabled individuals in Connecticut where investigators have cited abuse, neglect, or medical errors. This equates to approximately 1 of every 17 people who died over that time period. Of this amount, 53 people or nearly 70 percent died during care at private group homes or other private facilities.

Sadly, these deaths were not without some warning signs. While many private providers are providing excellent care there are too many examples of bad actors. Concerns about staffing, training and state oversight of privately run group homes have been raised repeatedly over the last decade. Furthermore, the State of Connecticut has increasingly relied on private group homes as they have moved away from state-run facilities. In 2005, during my tenure in the State Senate, I led an effort to stop this conversion after approximately 30 homes were changed over. This law was then extended in 2007 but lapsed in 2009 and there have been roughly 50 more state-run homes that have been converted since then. As part of its long-term plan, the Department of Developmental Services would like to shift completely to privately run homes.

The *Courant's* series unveiled a number of tragic examples. One such example was Rebecca Wojcik, a 59-year-old woman who was placed in a bathtub with scalding hot water. She sustained significant burns over 40 percent of her body and her skin was peeling off. Another was an unnamed 71-year-old woman who died in a nursing home from an accumulation of food in both lungs. Investigators found that the woman was force-fed because she did not want to eat or get out of bed to go to the dining area. Clearly, these individuals deserved better from our developmental disability care system. These examples and countless others from across the nation are indicative of a larger problem of the race to the bottom in our health care system. Privatization of care may mean lower costs but without the proper oversight and requirements for well-trained staff.

While individuals with developmental disabilities may not be able to speak for themselves, we are not absolved of the responsibility to care for them in a humane and fair manner. Yet, time and again we have seen stories like these. Again, I respectfully request that you conduct an investigation into this

issue. I believe that it would be able to shed light on the trend towards privatization and the impact that has on the care of the individuals. Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Murphy

United States Senator