



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Residential Facilities Ombudsman Program

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DATE: March 26, 2021

TO: Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery

RE: In support of SB 556 In-person inspections

My name is Toni Larson and I am the Residential Facilities Ombudsman (RFO) for children and adults living in homes and facilities licensed or certified for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 556.

In our role providing advocacy and resident-directed complaint resolution services we support more than 10,000 Oregonians residing in 2,600 homes statewide. Individuals request assistance with a wide-range of issues regarding quality of care and life. In our experience, requests for assistance directly from individuals occurs fifty percent of the time. In the remaining fifty percent, requests have been initiated on behalf of an individual by family and other professionals with direct involvement. Communication barriers, privacy and fear of retaliation are often factors in how we are contacted.

During the pandemic, residents have been drastically affected by the sharp reduction or suspension of licensing, case management and other professionals physically entering these settings to perform inspections or monitoring. Family and friends have been restricted. Reports of abuse across the state experienced a significant drop in number. At the same time, requests for assistance to our office illustrate that environmental conditions, access to food, money, property, personal supports, threats of involuntary move-out, and verbal/emotional abuse were magnified.

Our experience in serving individuals in residential settings indicates that in-person, on-site inspections play a critical role in identifying and pro-actively providing interventions that affect the quality of care for residents. While paper reviews can identify some issues, nothing replaces the observation, sight, smell and interactions with residents and staff to accurately identify issues related to health and safety and beyond.

The RFO offers enthusiastic support of SB556 as it requires in-person inspections supporting vulnerable Oregonians.

Thank you,

Toni Larson

Residential Facilities Ombudsman