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April 18, 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 represent VOR, a national nonprofit organization advocating for high quality care and human rights for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). We expressly support the right of individuals with I/DD to choose from a full array of high quality residential options, from small settings to licensed facility settings (e.g., Medicaid Intermediate Care Facilities for the Intellectually Disabled (ICFs/ID).

On March 4, 2013, U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy wrote to you requesting that the Office of Inspector General (IG), “undertake an immediate investigation into the alarming number of deaths and cases of abuse of developmentally disabled individuals in group homes.” Senator Murphy’s letter was in response to what he called the “prevalence of preventable deaths at privately run group homes across this nation and the widespread privatization of our delivery system,” with care costs borne predominately by Medicaid.

**VOR strongly supports Senator Murphy’s request for an immediate investigation into the preventable, predictable widespread tragedies impacting people with I/DD in small settings across the country.** Since 1997, VOR has been collecting examples of reported systemic abuse, neglect and death in small settings serving people with intellectual disabilities in 32 states, the District of Columbia, and several national reports (see, *Widespread Abuse, Neglect and Death in Small Settings Serving People with Intellectual Disabilities* (VOR, rev. April 2013)). These reports, by state auditors, university studies and investigative media, detail systemic concerns with quality care in community-based settings for persons with I/DD. Tragedies range from physical, emotional and financial abuse to neglect and death. Many of these outcomes are associated with aggressive deinstitutionalization, which results in the transfer of many vulnerable people with I/DD to small, unlicensed settings without adequately considering the ramifications of separating vulnerable people from specialized care.

Given the enormity of the human tragedies taking place across the country, often at the hands of HHS-funded organizations, we agree with Senator Murphy that an immediate investigation by the HHS Office of Inspector General is warranted.

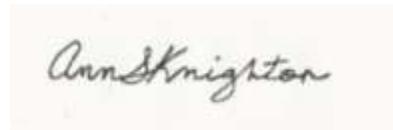
To protect individuals with I/DD who receive community-based care now or in the future, your office must look into how these tragedies occurred and how they can be prevented. As stated by Senator Murphy:

“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 [like the vast majority of states] has increasingly relied on private group homes as they have moved away from state-run facilities . . . 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.”

Please contact Tamie Hopp, VOR’s Director of Government Relations & Advocacy, with any questions (605-399-1624 voice; thopp@vor.net).

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann S. Knighton". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Ann S. Knighton  
President