

EAST CENTRAL GEORGIA REGIONAL HOSPITAL FAMILY COUNCIL

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The Family Council of the East Central Georgia Regional Center (“Gracewood”) Responds to Federal Inspection Report

AUGUSTA - The Family Council represents the residents of Gracewood facility, a Medicaid-licensed Intermediate Care Facility for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICFs/IID).

The Family Council is troubled by recent findings by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which in an inspection report is critical of the quality of care their family members receive at Gracewood.

Families have long pointed to robust federal oversight of ICF/IID homes as critical and a factor distinguishing Georgia’s ICFs/IID, including Gracewood, from community alternatives. ICFs/IID are subject to annual surveys involving eight conditions of participation with hundreds of standards to remain licensed.

“We are absolutely troubled by these findings,” said Theresa Senior, Vice President of the Family Council. “But we take great comfort in the oversight process that ensures our family members’ homes remain safe. The same is not true in the community where oversight is lacking and even, in some cases, non-existent. It took a media attention before the state and the Department of Justice got serious about the alarming tragedies in community settings involving those transferring from ICFs/IID.”

An *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article described alarming rates of abuse and neglect of former ICF/IID residents. Forty such individuals died in community group homes, and a State’s own report cites thousands of hospitalizations, among other challenges such as law enforcement encounters, elopements and injuries.

Community transfers are due to the implementation of a federal settlement agreement between the State of Georgia and the United States Department of Justice. Transitions are now on hold as the State works to satisfy the Department of Justice that future transitions will be safe.

Families blame the implementation of the settlement for CMS’ findings.

“We are not aware of any other time in Gracewood’s long history in which CMS found Gracewood to be in violation,” remarked Ann Knighton, Past President and current officer of the Family Council. “The Settlement has led to the closure of other homes like Gracewood in our State. Understandably, staff morale is at an all-time low. Tenured staff are leaving.”

“The Family Council demands that Gracewood be fixed, not closed,” concluded Knighton.

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