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Office of Lt. Governor Brian Calley  
Chairperson, Michigan Mental Health and Wellness Commission  
PO Box 30013  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Lt. Governor Calley and Commission Members:

My family has lived in Burtchville Township for many decades, we have raised six children, one of whom, Nicholas, happens to have Down Syndrome. Our son is now 22 and lives in a Home of Your Own (HOYO). In January of 2011, we had unexpected mental health issues with Nicholas resulting in his placement in a group home in February of that same year. In spite of our dread of group home residency, the stigma was not warranted in this case. The home was staffed with compassionate and skilled persons who were professional and caring. They presented a calm demeanor in the face of his disruptive behaviors. Nicholas improved with their help and enjoyed the busy environment, living with five other males and having two to three staff on duty all the time. Despite the excellent history of this group home and our efforts to keep it open, St. Clair County Community Mental Health (SCCCMH) closed this home in May of 2012. We became aware that it was slated to close after Nicholas had lived there only seven months.

We are concerned that our son, and many in his same circumstance, will be moved from home to home throughout their life in spite of the knowledge that routine and consistency is so often necessary for mental health. We are fully aware that some changes are inevitable and life cannot be fully predictable or controlled. Yet, we need to stress **the importance of providing the basic comfort and security of knowing where one lives.**

After meeting with the administration of SCCCMMH, we were given the option of a HOYO to provide his Own Home and to avoid a future of unexpected moves. SCCCMMH sponsored several programs for the public to attend and encouraged HOYO participation and opportunities to meet prospective roommates. Our family purchased a home for this purpose and our son and two other men now live there. Unfortunately, SCCCMMH now states that

contract staffing to HOYOs are more expensive than first thought. Those that find themselves in the same position that our family did have now been told that they will not be eligible for services in a HOYO, yet the number of group home beds continues to dwindle as does the number of Adult Foster Care (AFC) beds. Where are their loved ones to be placed?

We are fortunate to have our HOYO established, yet staffing contracts have been decreased and budget deficits at SCCCMH may force further cuts. The most vulnerable are those that suffer. Our staff is still excellent, providing all the basic activities of daily living for the residents and dealing with the delicate balance of mental health issues. These caring folks all work at least two jobs but feel the slash of budget cuts first. Yet, SCCCMH administration continues to purchase new vehicles, provide gym memberships, build new buildings and boasts that they have been able to rehire all those laid off due to the current budget deficit.

We have heard from parents and guardians that they were notified, with only hours to prepare, that their loved ones would be moved from one group home to another. I was recently told by Debra Johnson, the executive director of SCCCMH that the only time a resident would be moved was for a change in their medical needs. This has not been the case. Residents were moved to allow another to have their bed. The transitioning time for these residents was negligible. There was none. Belongings were packed in black trash bags and they were moved as if they were articles of furnishings instead of people. The effect can be devastating. It would be to you or me.

We have also been told that group homes are not "homes", but rather "treatment facilities". In what way then are they better than the old institutions to which we objected so strongly? My presence here today is to bring to light some of the most troubling issues facing families that have members requiring Community Mental Health intervention. These individuals need to know that HOME is much more permanent than what they have been recently experiencing.

In January 2014, the Thumb Alliance PIHP is to be replaced with the proposed Region 10 PIHP which will align St. Clair County, Sanilac County, Lapeer County and Genesee County. It is geographically sound, however the power is unbalanced as the director of the Sanilac County CMH, and the director of the St. Clair County CMH are a married couple. In addition, the interim director of the proposed Region 10 is the past executive director of St. Clair County CMH. It is not surprising that the general public was unaware of the new Region 10 board positions. This effectively limited the selection to those persons that SCCCMH desired to have represent them on the proposed Region 10 board. While it is important to have a cooperative, productive board, it is also necessary to comprise that board

of individuals bringing varied viewpoints, concerns and skills. They should not be there to simply rubber stamp the desires of the local CMH.

Unfortunately, the information about this Mental Health and Wellness Commission and public hearing was not easy to find. Our local ARC forwarded the notice two weeks ago and the local newspaper published information just two days ago, leaving concerned citizens little time to prepare to attend. Even the state website continues to state that, "more details will be provided closer to the date of the hearings". Lack of adequate notification is further complicated by the fact that, in order to be included on the agenda, one has to contact the very entity that they are testifying about. Other stakeholders are worried about recrimination to themselves, their loved ones and even to their caseworkers.

I would like to see oversight that ensures the respect, safety and security of the people served by Community Mental Health by providing appropriate long term residential placements with necessary supports. I strongly agree with this statement from the Michigan Department of Community Health where they directed PIHPs, "to further recommit to finding the best ways to assure that those with the greatest vulnerabilities and least capacity to advocate for themselves are supported in ways that celebrate their humanity and recognize the right to a life of meaningful and personal dignity."

Respectfully submitted,

Martha L. Serafin