

THE GREEN WIRE

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Sen. Green Calls for the Passage of SB 986 to Protect the Mentally Disabled in Private Facilities

JEFFERSON CITY, MO – Sen. Timothy Green, D-Spanish Lake, called on his colleagues to pass Senate Bill 986 to protect the mentally disabled in private facilities.

Families of habilitation center clients from across Missouri met in the Capitol today to decry the state's refusal to reveal where incidents of neglect and abuse are occurring in private group homes.

The families called on the state to not only begin scrutinizing private facilities, but to strengthen the state's habilitation centers which have faced cutbacks and in the case of Bellefontaine, the threat of closure. Sen. Green is the sponsor of legislation that would require the private, loosely regulated facilities to be held to the same standards of care as state-run habilitation centers.

“The fact is, Missouri's disabled citizens need each and every one of these hab centers,” said Ronald Wehmeyer, president of the Higginsville Habilitation Center Parents Association. “We have to make sure the politicians know this is a statewide fight. When one hab center is targeted, they are all threatened.”

News media accounts as recently as March 27 have cited instances where the lives of former habilitation center clients now living in private group homes were endangered. A series of reports from the state auditor, most recently in October, have documented a pervasive pattern of neglect and abuse in Missouri's private group home industry. In particular, the auditor's office has been critical of the lack of state oversight and the failure of private group homes to report incidents of abuse and neglect.

A March 26 editorial in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch called the state's policy of pushing habilitation center clients into private group homes “reckless” because of that lack of oversight.

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“The staff at Bellefontaine saved my brother’s life,” said Mary Vitale. Her 53-year old brother has been at Bellefontaine for over 40 years. Vitale rebuked the state for attempting to evict clients like her brother while refusing to reveal problem group homes.

Senate Bill 986, sponsored by Timothy Green (D-13) and House Bill 1848, sponsored by Rep. Joe Aull (D-26) and cosponsored by Rep. Gina Walsh (D-69) came in response to the wave of reports this fall of private group home problems.

“In recent months a series of news accounts and state audits have revealed serious abuse and neglect in privately operated facilities for the developmentally disabled.” said Sen. Green.

Deficiencies included staff poorly trained and supervised, scant reporting requirements and a lack of accountability. The state has been forcing habilitation center residents into private facilities this past year. Families from centers across Missouri decried the state’s transfer of clients into the private group home industry as resources for Habilitation centers are cut.

“Many of the provisions in the SB 986 are modeled on standards found in the state’s facilities and in recently enacted regulations for nursing homes and foster care providers.” stated Sen. Green.

“These Hab centers are communities within communities and many residences that reside in them can not survive in other placements.” said Sen. Green. “Many of the adult residents at the habilitation center have lived at the facility for over 20 years, and some for even 50 years. The habilitation center is their home. The employees and other residents are their families.”
