

THE GREEN WIRE

SENATOR TIMOTHY P. GREEN - DISTRICT 13

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In recent weeks an investigative series by St. Louis Post Dispatch writers, Carolyn Tuft and Joe Mahr have revealed serious abuse and neglect in privately operated facilities for the developmentally disabled. Missouri's system to catch abuse and neglect at private facilities for mentally retarded residents is in some key ways worse than the state's often criticized practices in policing its own institutions. These reporters have done a remarkable job in bringing awareness of the appalling failures of the mental health system.

In response to a revealing audit by State Auditor Claire McCaskill, I called on my colleagues to pass Senate Bill 986 to protect the mentally disabled in private facilities. The legislation would require the private, loosely regulated facilities to be held to the same standards of care as state-run habilitation centers. The private group home industry needs to be held to the same standards, review and oversight as the state-run facilities, which are required to meet certain standards by the federal government.

For the past ten years I have been fighting for the mentally disabled. I have fought for more adequate pay for quality staff which is the only way to ensure quality care of our most vulnerable Missourians. Senate President Pro Tem Michael Gibbons now thinks it is past time to give the Department of Mental Health a very thorough review to address the problem. Republican Gov. Matt Blunt issued a news release and Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder is to oversee a study of the department's problems. Study time is over—it is time to act and pass legislation during the 2007 legislative session that ensures private facilities are held to the same standards of accountability and oversight.

During the 2006 legislative session, SB 986, sponsored by me and HB 1848, sponsored by Rep. Joe Aull and cosponsored by Rep. Gina Walsh, came in response to the wave of media reports last fall of private group home problems. The senate bill did not even receive a committee hearing. Deficiencies included poorly trained and supervised staff, scant reporting requirements and a lack of accountability. The state has been forcing habilitation center residents into private facilities this past year. A moratorium is required to halt these transfers until private facilities are held to the same standards as state run habilitation centers that have accountability and oversight.