



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Defending the DDD Provider Community

July 17, 2025

“This has been the worst six months, ever!” An utterance made numerous times over the last month by I/DD providers who have worked in the field for decades, through Sandy, interminable periods without a rate increase, the transition of their business model from moderate to maximum risk and responsibility, chronic staffing shortages, and a worldwide pandemic. The recent barrage of assaults on our system within an abbreviated period barely gave us enough time to catch a breath and has left some providers feeling “scarred” from

- Fighting to prevent a 5% rate cut.
- Fighting to prevent the erosion of Medicaid and SNAP benefits
- Fighting to prevent threats to the capacity of licensed and certified agencies to perform vital services and provide desired results for the I/DD community

We have always educated and advocated. But the fact that these were simultaneous and consequentially more substantial and pivotal than was typical, made it more challenging than usual. Nevertheless, we did what we always do through the democratic political process and as a result we won some and lost some. In addition, over this same time period we have been

- Slammed by a series of sensationalized articles in the press

The journalists wrote what they had learned with the goal of making systemic improvements. We suspect they were frustrated by privacy and human rights laws which precluded providers from sharing information on individual cases. Prior to and throughout the series publication, ABCD provided a great deal of general information and ideas for change as outlined in our numerous public policy positions. For some reason, not an iota of what we provided made the cut. Politics is a war for attention. We recognized this as an effort to seize control of the political narrative to focus on our serious flaws, faults, and errors. For this reason, we value the intent of the press.

But the tactic of disregarding perspective and context, providing information intended to elicit a response rather than communicate information can have damaging consequences. Though everything reported in the series’ 5- and 12-year look backs is undoubtedly true, omissions created a distorted picture leading those outside our system to conclude that circumstances in a majority of group homes are “dire” and in “crisis,” while many of our members didn’t recognize what they were reading.

- The Ombudsperson annual report

Throughout the years the ombudsperson has not hidden his frustration at what he sees as the lack of or slow-moving response to his concerns. Perhaps this frustration and sense of urgency motivated him to often use inflammatory words and descriptions in his annual reports. After all, politics is a war for attention. The most recent report was more balanced and accessible, which included an overview of the vast system of care for children and adults with I/DD and raised many questions and suggestions; food for thought and discussion moving forward. He took pains during his follow-up television interview with Spotlight News on July 8, 2025, to provide more detail:

“I found on the one hand we have a very good system, a strong system. We have a lot of good people in and out of government. We have a lot of resources...we have a good provider community...But what we (referring to his office) deal within our office are those who have essentially fallen through the cracks in the system... I am very careful not to try and quantify it (referring to abuse and neglect) and say it’s in most group homes...I couldn’t tell you that...in fact, I think most providers, actually really try to do the right thing...a lot of this work is hard... I have found agencies, good ones, trying to raise the bar.”

Yet, some readers concluded that the report was “blistering” and the situation “dire.” Rather than ask us why since 2017 the budget for community provider resources significantly outpaced the number of new enrollees, he posted pictures from the state budget leaving it to the reader to conclude that we may be fleecing the state.¹ And in describing group homes in the report, the ombudsperson did use the terms “full blown crisis” and “rampant” abuse and neglect, rebutting his own interview. Old habits die hard.

Here is an interesting anecdote. The new state unit, which is outside of our division and charged with conducting two unannounced annual visits to each group home expected and were prepared to find widespread abuse and neglect. They haven’t. During their three years of operation the findings remain at 1% which include lost/misplaced hearing aids and glasses as the foremost examples of neglect. This is not to minimize the importance and value of this new state unit or play down the tragedies and instances of subpar care which occur. 1% is still too high. We have always maintained that people with I/DD are at greater risk and experience higher rates of abuse, neglect, and exploitation (ANE) than the public, which is why we must continue to operate under this assumption and remain ever vigilant to prevent, protect and prosecute ANE in our community.

¹ The overall budget has increased because rates for Support Coordination and Day Habilitation were unsustainably low and were subsequently raised by 50% and 20%, respectively, in 2021 and 2022; the DDD population is living longer and need more services and supports as they age; the number of individuals with high medical, mental health and behavioral needs accessing services has increased; and individuals are choosing more expensive services and supports according to DHS trend analysis.

But the ongoing infusion into the discourse of incomplete data and opinion disguised as fact by numerous sources has led to a distorted and inaccurate picture not only for the public but for some state workers. In turn this has resulted in an erosion of the community's trust in and credibility of our group homes, strained relations, and polarization. Most seriously, it can lead to poor policy decisions which may not address the real issue, misallocate resources, and potentially cause harm instead of solving problems. And we in the community will be left holding the bag. We really hate bad policies.

ABCD members remain committed to ensuring the highest standards when providing service and supports to the individuals to whom they have devoted their professional lives. ABCD will continue to advocate for improvements in the system so that no one, particularly those with complex and hard-to-serve needs, is overlooked. We ask for neither sympathy nor sainthood. All we ask for is clear sightedness by all who have the responsibility to report on our system so that as a result, we do a better job.