



Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

A Philosophical and Policy Tug of War between Safety and Liberty

Electronic Surveillance in I/DD Group Homes

Updated to Include Response to the National Council on Severe Autism, NJ Chapter's Recent Article on Cameras in Group Homes for People with Disabilities.

Home and Community Based Services is rooted in the disability rights movement, not in the hierarchical medical model of treatment. Civil rights include not only ensuring safety and health, but physical access, freedom of expression, choice and thought as well as the right to privacy, education, and work. The mission of our agencies is to attain all the above.

Since the summer of 2019, the policy of cameras in group homes has been discussed, written about and testified too; exposing the depth of the deadlock on the proposed compromise of a compromise. The solution is not to tear up the current compromise but to renew it.

NJ regulations already permit cameras in licensed group homes (LGH) provided the agency has an approved DDD/DHS policy which clarifies provider responsibilities, protects the rights of the individual and the minority, follows best practice guidelines, and neither violates federal policy nor jeopardizes federal funding, unlike the proposed bill and its antecedents. Almost one-third of agencies with LGH have met or are in the process of meeting the strict criteria for cameras in communal areas.

As we have been stating for over 6 years and believe it bears constant repeating, there is no definitive evidence that establishes the truth of the claim that cameras in a congregate setting prevent abuse. In fact, there are concerns that they might make people less safe by creating a false sense of security. Despite cameras in their residences, Bellwether's license for 62 group homes was revoked by the State of NJ in 2019 following extensive reports of abuse, neglect, dangerous staff shortages, and unapproved restraints.

The recent white paper by the NCSA-NJ Chapter contains misleading statements about proof that cameras can deter abuse in our state's group homes.^{1 2} As a result, this paper undermines the integrity of government procedure and decision making and conveys a lack of respect for the policy making process.

¹ *Cameras in Group Homes for People with Disabilities*, June 2026 National Council on Severe Autism- New Jersey Chapter, p.4.

² *ABCD Response to NCSA-NJ Chapter June 2026 White Paper.* www.abcdnj.org/advocacy

We continue to support the current compromise which enables us to manage the need to provide the security and safety individuals require without abandoning the dignity and independence they rightly demand. The current compromise concedes that both groups have weight and standing. Until the data changes, we believe it wrong to allow this one possibly minority position to define policy for everyone else.

To build and maintain cultures of safety, providers must remain vigilant, consistently operationalizing, reinforcing, measuring and validating their prevention policies and efforts. Agencies must protect those in their care while preserving trust in their organizations.

Following are some ideas to improve health and safety without jeopardizing the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

1. A policy evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the OPIA Report Card in preventing and unearthing actual safety and risk.
2. Give DDD the enforcement authority and the resources to ensure service provider applicants obey all laws, regulations and rules before they are entitled to receive payment for services. This protocol is currently in place for CSOC in DCF.
3. Establish permanent Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation Prevention Best Practices Roundtable in DDD.
4. Reframe the two-year Disability Mortality and Abuse Prevention Review Board into a standing committee.
5. Update the Central Registry statute, to mirror the applicability standards of the Child Abuse Record Information background check (CARI).
6. Update the Stephen Komninos Law to include unlicensed group homes receiving Medicaid funding for services.

The Hidden at Home series stated that this bill has languished in Trenton. Correct. Unproven policies should languish while definitive evidence must become the new standard for care and abuse prevention.

July 21, 2026