Alliance for the Betterment of
Citizens with Disabilities

Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Cameras! Cameras! Cameras!

It is no longer accurate to claim that this advocacy effort is about preventing abuse and neglect.

There are people who truly believe that cameras in group homes prevent abuse and neglect, but the data does not support this feeling. We have continued to point out this fact since our 2020 white paper. Despite the claim made in NCSA NJ Chapter's June 2026 white paper that "cameras deter abuse in New Jersey's group homes," upon review, none of their four references support the statement. If NCSA NJ Chapter could have found data to support their claim, we suspect that they would have used it.

Here in NJ, despite cameras in their residences, Bellwether's license for 62 group homes was revoked by the State of NJ in 2019 following extensive reports of abuse, neglect, dangerous staff shortages, and unapproved restraints. Recently, we analyzed the available data through CY2025 for New Jersey and found that despite more agencies with camera policies and more cameras in group homes, there is no indication that neglect and abuse have been decreased or prevented during this period.

Camera use in group homes has increased despite the inability to pass legislation.

Since 2018, the policy of cameras in group homes has been discussed, written about and testified to. During this same period, the percentage of group home agencies with approved camera policies has increased from 3% to, by the end of 2026/early 2027, 33% which collectively operate 40% of the licensed group homes in the state. It is our understanding that not all of these agencies have cameras in all of their homes, so a more accurate statement would be that between late 2026/early 2027 up to 40% of group homes may provide camera surveillance in their congregate settings. The current trend over the last four years is 3-4 agency approvals per year by OPIA/DHS[1] for cameras.

What happened? While stakeholders were publicly debating the issue, some agencies became convinced that they should install cameras in their homes because they either believed that cameras would provide a benefit to families and those in their care, wanted to meet consumer demand, figured the legislation would pass and wanted to get ahead of it, or didn't want to fight about the issue. Meanwhile OPIA/DHS developed a sturdy policy that found balance and

[1] Office of Program Integrity and Accountability in the New Jersey Department of Human Services. OPIA is separate from and not within the Division of Developmental Disabilities, which it oversees.

reduced risk of violating individual rights under the ADA and person-centered planning under HCBS. This process also minimizes operational issues and chaos in people's homes

ABCD's foremost concern about the legislation is not the policy, it's the process.

DHS/OPIA has a process by which an agency can be approved to have cameras in their group homes. The process details procedures that providers must take to outline their responsibilities, protect the rights of the individual and the minority, follow best practice guidelines, and neither violate federal laws and policies nor jeopardize federal funding, unlike the proposed bill and its antecedents. Today individuals and their guardians consider this option before choosing a group home, which means that they can make the choice freely, without pressure from housemates or their guardians.

The legislation is opposed by the 3 trade associations which represent agencies providing IDD services in the community. Though prohibited from having an official position on legislation, the State's designated Protection and Advocacy system under federal law, Disability Rights New Jersey, has expressed serious concerns.

The current process provides choice and minimizes risk within the established federal paradigms.

Surveillance cameras can help substantiate allegations of abuse and neglect.

Correct. Cameras can help substantiate allegations provided that the action took place in the group home kitchen, dining room, or living room and not in the bedroom or bathroom, where they are forbidden not only in the proposed legislation, but by state and federal government.

There may not be enough group homes with cameras in NJ to meet demand overall or in certain pockets of the state.

We understand and support some individuals and families' desire for camera surveillance in their group homes. This is their choice.

Short a survey, we have no idea how large or focused this demand is. We have no doubt that some families are unable to access this service in the area that they would like their son or daughter to live in. Despite the statewide housing crisis and DDD providers uncertainty about federal Medicaid funding, approximately 1,100 additional licensed beds in our system are projected to come online by FY 2029. As we stated before, the current trend is 3-4 agencies per year are approved for cameras by OPIA/DHS.

Short of mandating cameras in all New Jersey licensed group homes, which would infringe on people's choice not to have cameras in their home, the solution is to speak with providers and convince them of the demand and the need. The growth of group homes during this period of vigorous public discussion, bears out the impact of advocacy.

Everyone's rights must be respected.

ABCD continues to promote and develop suggestions for statewide systemic changes to prevent abuse and neglect.

To build and maintain cultures of safety, ABCD providers remain vigilant, consistently operationalizing, reinforcing, measuring and validating their agencies prevention policies and efforts. The state also plays an important role in establishing and maintaining cultures of safety through generation and enforcement of a set of regulations, policies and guidelines which ensure quality and standards, accountability and oversight, fairness and coordination.

Following are six ideas (with a seventh in development) for the State's efforts 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.[2]
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.

As a result of our analysis of data through CY2025, ABCD is deeply concerned that neglect and abuse have not decreased over the last several years, despite numerous efforts.

We are resolved to turn this around.

[2] We are very pleased to announce that in response to our concern regarding the ease with which an entity can become and be paid for DDD Waiver Services, the Division of Developmental Disabilities recently unveiled a new process that would change the new provider enrollment period from 365 days/year to twice annual enrollment periods. DDD will shut down the current system in FY27 and reopen the new system in September of 2027. DDD believes that this process will enable them to better police development and result in higher quality and better prepared providers

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