

My name is Sarah Schneider and I am the chair of the board of of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, the only national disability civil rights organization run by and for people with developmental disabilities. I work for SEIU, although I am testifying today as myself and not on behalf of either ASAN or SEIU.

As a person with a developmental disability and as a disability rights advocate, I support this bill because I believe nobody should be forced to live in an institution. Everybody deserves choices about where we live and who we live with. Case managers are required to offer people coming into the DD service system at least 3 different options for service settings, but right now they can offer options that are all congregate, segregated service settings that unnecessarily restrict people's autonomy, such as group homes and adult foster homes.

The *Olmsted* decision in 1999 guaranteed people with disabilities the right to receive services in the most integrated setting possible. Group homes and adult foster homes are segregated, and we all know there is no such thing as "separate but equal." Nobody *needs* to live in a group home to get their support needs met. Many people end up in group homes because they either don't know what the other options are, or because they can't find affordable, accessible housing. Any level of support needs can be met in a private home or apartment with in-home services, as long as the state provides the right support. Segregated housing is a violation of our *Olmstead* rights.

The lack of affordable housing is a huge issue, but providing support services in people's own homes saves the state an enormous amount of money. The average cost of providing support services in a group home is more than \$9200 per person per month. In-home services average only about \$2400/month per case. SEIU research, based on data the providers report, shows that group home worker turnover alone could cost the state up to \$126 million per year. For an estimated \$34 million, the state could pay for independent integrated housing at market rate for every person who currently lives in a group home.

Living and receiving services in a group home where your landlord and service provider are the same entity creates a dangerous power dynamic. Some of these providers also run sheltered workshops. Imagine if your landlord, your boss, and the support service provider who helps you with bathing and dressing were all the same person. Imagine if you didn't get along with your roommates and wanted to move to a different house, but knew that if you did you would also lose your job and your support provider. Or if you didn't get along with your support provider but knew that the only way to change providers was to lose your housing. This system limits choices for people with disabilities and gives providers a dangerous level of power over people's lives.

This bill would require that case managers offer the option of independent living to everyone who comes into the DD system. Living independently, with whatever support services we need provided in our own homes or apartments, should be the default option for people with developmental disabilities, not the exception. When support services are separated from real estate, people can make the decision to switch service providers without risking becoming homeless. Everybody should be able to choose where to live, and nobody should be forced to live in an institution.