

With its recent series “*Suffering in Secret*,” the Chicago Tribune has given high profile to an important public policy issue that has been ignored by state leaders for far too long: the growing crises in the system of community-based care for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Notably, the lack of adequate investment of state resources into community care.

As a coalition of individuals and families receiving services, front-line and professional staff, and community-based service providers, we were heartbroken by the stories of suffering uncovered by the series and we grieve with families in the face of unspeakable loss. For years, our community has been sounding the alarm about this growing crisis.

As the Tribune acknowledged in their Nov. 25 editorial (*The Moral Test of Government*) this is an inherently difficult and demanding field of service. No one enters this calling because it is easy or lucrative. The individuals and organizations dedicated to this field are driven by their compassion and a sense of mission. We all continuously strive to minimize the risk of failures in the system, and always stand ready to advance and support meaningful reforms that are person-centered and improve quality of life.

That said it has now been almost a year since a Federally-appointed court monitor found that the State of Illinois was out of compliance with a consent decree mandating access to community care. That monitor found that the single most critical issue facing access to and the quality of community-based services and supports is the inability to recruit and retain frontline staff — driven by year-over-year inadequate investment of state funding for nearly a decade.

This official finding, and the need to bring the state into compliance with its legal responsibilities, was what convinced the General Assembly to overwhelmingly pass legislation to provide a living wage for frontline staff. Unfortunately, that effort failed in mid-November when legislators were unable to overcome a Gubernatorial veto. That legislation represented the greatest step we could have taken in addressing many of the core problems outlined in the Chicago Tribune's series.

The problems the Tribune has identified should not overshadow all the vitally important and beneficial work that is done every day in community-based agencies. There are countless families across Illinois who can attest to the fact that community-based care has provided flexibility, person-centered supports, and a better quality of life for their loved ones.

We acknowledge the other important issues raised by the Chicago Tribune regarding transparency, oversight, and other ways to improve reporting and accountability. But we must be clear that enactment of new reforms will not resolve the issues raised unless the state provides the resources to address the staffing crisis facing this field. To do otherwise would only serve to avoid the real solutions this problem needs, and create even bigger problems down the road. And that’s something Illinois has seen too much of in recent years.

We always stand ready to advance and support meaningful reforms that are person-centered and improve quality of life. We welcome the opportunity to continue working with the individuals and families we serve and state government towards those ends.

Tony Paulauski
Executive Director
The Arc of Illinois

Janet S. Stover
President & CEO
Illinois Association of
Rehabilitation Facilities (IARF)

Mike Bibo
President
Center for Developmental
Disabilities Advocacy &
Community Supports

Kathy Carmody
Chief Executive Officer
Institute on Public Policy
for People with Disabilities

Roberta Lynch
Executive Director
AFSCME Council 31

Vickie Kean
President
Don Moss & Associates

Ed McManus
President
McManus Consulting