

January 22, 2015 3:15AM

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OUR VIEW: Don't write off group homes

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Somebody needs to set him straight.

Cuomo recently vetoed four bills that advocates for the developmentally disabled believe would have helped the state identify and correct gaps in services across the state. Among them: funding for more group homes. His administration's policy aims to give people with developmental disabilities more say in the services they receive and to integrate them into the community better by helping them get jobs and to live outside institutions and group homes.

That's OK — up to a point.

The issue Cuomo ignores is what will happen to some developmentally disabled people once their caregivers no longer are around. Right now, few beds are available in group homes, those that are available go to people living in institutions or to those who are in emergency situations.

Meanwhile, people like Lorienne Tokarsky, 33, face an uncertain future. She currently lives with her parents, and her dad, Kenneth Tokarsky, 66, of Rome, worries about what will happen to her once he and his wife are gone.

Louis Tehan, president and CEO of Upstate Cerebral Palsy, says money is an issue since group homes cost much more than more community-based level of care — mainly apartment programs. But while apartment programs work well for some, that might not be the right thing for others.

The four bills Cuomo vetoed (all were supported by Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi, D-Utica, and state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-Rome) addressed some of advocates' concerns, including a study of the unmet service needs and a plan to address them, said Karen Korotzer, executive director of The Arc, Oneida-Lewis Chapter. Korotzer said she hopes the budget will fund such an analysis with input from everyone involved, including people with developmental disabilities and their families.

That certainly would make sense. No one would argue against programs that help people with developmental disabilities live more independently. But it is unconscionable to ignore those who truly need extended services.

If funding is a problem, perhaps Cuomo can use the state's gambling revenue to help pay the tab.

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