

**Advocates
'speak
out' on
adult
home
reform**



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Members of the Coalition of the Institutionalized Aged and Disabled along with mental health advocates gathered in the Well of the Legislative Office Building last Wednesday for an Adult Home Resident "Speak Out!" rally.

After the rally, coalition members met with legislators and other state officials to lobby for better conditions and health services within adult homes and for increased access to alternative independent facilities.

About 500 psychiatrically disabled adult home residents are ready, willing and able to move to out of these adult homes and into more appropriate independent housing, according to an assessment by the state Office of Mental Health and Health Department done a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, the coalition says, most of these residents haven't had access to independent facilities and are not able to get out of the homes they are in.

"Permanent housing is a double-edge sword because once you are in an adult home it is hard to get out," said Jeff Lieberman, the coalition's executive director. "Policymakers feel 'well they have a roof over their heads' so the priority of other housing goes to people who are homeless."

"The adult homes are institutional in nature, but haven't over the years provided the recovery and rehabilitative services that these people need to develop skills that they could use to live more independent lives in their community," said Lieberman.

The Coalition of the Institutionalized Aged and Disabled is a nonprofit, consumer-led advocacy organization of adult home and nursing home residents and residents' councils whose goal is to provide residents with the information and skills needed to advocate for themselves, to protect and promote the rights of residents, and to improve the quality of their lives and their care.

Lieberman explained that one of the coalition's concerns is the large number of people with mental disabilities who are living in New York's adult care facilities. This situation, he explained, started to occur during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when New York began downsizing psychiatric hospitals. "A lot of people ended up on the street and a good number ended up in the adult homes," said Lieberman.

According to the coalition's Web site, there are about 28,000 people living in New York state's 453 licensed adult homes. Approximately 11,000 adult home residents, almost 40 percent of the state's adult home population, have been diagnosed as having a mental illness, according to the site. The coalition states that since adult homes are not considered health care facilities they are prohibited by regulations from directly providing health care services or employing staff to provide health care services. Adult homes can only provide meals, housekeeping, personal care and case management.

The coalition is also lobbying for a mental health waitlist bill that was vetoed during previous legislative sessions by both Gov. George E. Pataki and Spitzer, according to Norman Bloomfield, president of the Resident Council in Surf Manor Home for Adults in Brooklyn. "We are hoping he won't veto it this year. Sen. Morahan and Assemblyman Rivera are working to get this through," said Bloo