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Unbearable: Fed Up Seniors Demand A/C In Adult Homes

By Michèle De Meglio

Tired of sleeping in sweltering bedrooms, residents of adult homes are banding together to demand that the state foot the bill for air conditioners.

At a meeting hosted by the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled (CIAD), a non-profit organization representing resident councils of nursing and adult homes, residents charged that staying in their overheated rooms during the scorching summer months is a health hazard.



Noor Alam of the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled said the state must pay for air conditioners to be installed in adult homes.

"The situations in our adult homes are so bad when it comes to heat that it's dangerous in the summertime," asserted Gerard Heller, president of the resident council at Surf Manor Home for Adults, located at 2316 Surf Avenue.

"Heat is really not a luxury for residents of adult homes. It's a matter of life and death," agreed Noor Alam of CIAD.

According to health officials, many residents of adult care facilities suffer from cardiopulmonary conditions, which leave them open to complications caused by warm weather.

Many also take psychotropic medications, making them less able to handle high temperatures.

"One resident was sent to the hospital with heat exhaustion," said Norman Bloomfield, who resides at Surf Manor.

Currently, residents trying to beat the heat must pay a fee to maintain an air conditioner in their bedrooms.

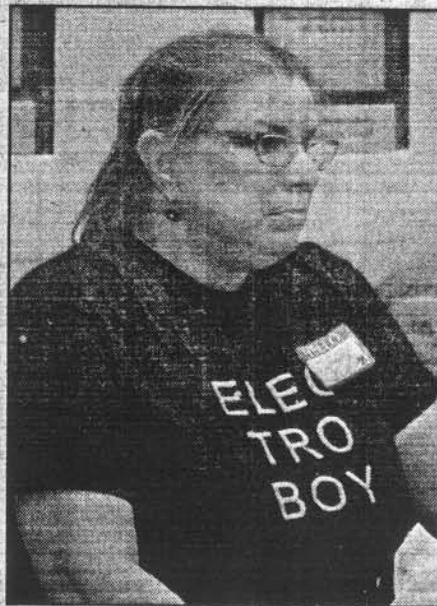
Several people said this fee is about \$125 a month. As many facilities put two people to a room, the centers receive \$250 a month to run an air conditioner in one room.

For residents receiving as little as \$130 in Supplemental Security Income (SSI), obtaining an air conditioner in their rooms is just a fantasy.

That's why they are asking the state to pay for air conditioning in all adult homes, which are state licensed facilities.

Reps from CIAD estimate this would cost the state \$7 million.

"About 90 percent of rooms do not have air conditioning," Bloomfield explained.



"Normally I go to sleep in a pool of sweat and I wake up in a pool of sweat," said Irene Kaplan, a resident of Surf Manor Home for Adults.

With bedrooms measuring at around 90 degrees, little relief can be found without air conditioning, Alam said.

"Forget the fans. They don't work when the temperature is above 85 degrees," she said.

Several residents revealed horror stories of dealing with extreme heat.

"I don't have air conditioning in my



State Senator Kevin Parker said he was "appalled" by the residents' stories.

Photos by Bob Hacken

room," said Irving Pereira, who resides at Brooklyn Manor, 2830 Pitkin Avenue. "A week ago, there were two hot days and I went through a very terrible experience in my room."

"I am taking drugs which interfere with my body's ability to regulate my temperature," said Surf Manor resident Irene Kaplan. "Normally I go to sleep in a pool of

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Make State Pay For A/C, Say Seniors

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sweat and I wake up in a pool of sweat."

Seeking relief, residents have been known to sleep in common areas, such as rec rooms, which are air conditioned.

"During the heat wave, people were actually sleeping in the lobby and chapel because that's the only place where they have air conditioning," said Sally Pottruck, who lives at the Garden of Eden Home, 1608-1620 Stillwell Avenue.

However, many of these areas cannot accommodate all of a facility's residents, Alam said.

"A lot of common areas fit 20-30 people but many homes fit 100-200 people," she said.

Assemblymember Jim Brennan said legislators are to blame for allowing adult homes to remain without air conditioning.

He proposed that the operators of the facilities meet with state officials to discuss their budgetary needs and see if there is a way for air conditioners to be provided.

"Summertime is a nightmare for adult home residents because of a lack of air conditioning and the fact that you take medication," he said.

"It's the obligation of New York State government to help you," he told residents. "You shouldn't have to live in such lousy conditions."

For more information about CIAD, log onto www.ciadny.org or contact 212-481-7572.



Most adult home residents in attendance raise their hands when asked if someone at their facility has been hospitalized for a heat-related illness.

Photo by Bob Hacken