

Coalition advocates for adult home residents

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With the hottest days of the summer rapidly approaching, the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled, voiced concerns last Thursday over expensive and inaccessible air conditioning for adult home residents.

The coalition spoke in support of a number of bills aimed at reforming the adult home system, including bill A.7069, sponsored by Assemblyman James Brennan, D-Brooklyn, which would ease the financial burden of having air conditioning and set more "reasonable" prices for residents. The bill passed unanimously in the Assembly in May but does not have a Senate sponsor.

At the press conference last week, Sen. Thomas Morahan, R,C,I,WF-New City, said he would review the bill.

According to the New York State Coalition for Adult Home Reform, of the 25 adult homes in New York City, 36 percent charge additional fees for air conditioning. Two of the homes charge as much as \$100 a month per resident.

"It's kind of a high price to pay to keep yourself comfortable enough so you don't get sick," said Irene Kaplan, Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled vice president.

Kaplan said she was recently hospitalized due to unbearable heat, and for the first time in 14 years had to go to an emergency room.

"It gets too heavy to breathe. I have asthma. I also have a minor heart condition," she said. "I move as little as humanly possible, and when I do, I have a wet towel hung around my neck."

The impersonal nature of the care at most adult homes, and the poor living conditions are also issues that need to be addressed, said Woody Williams, president of Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled. He said the "bottom line" is all most administrators care about, and they will provide the minimum services possible to pass inspection.

"I don't know how many times I've heard it referred to as the adult home industry," said Williams. "You're dealing with people, not cars."

Also discussed at the press conference was bill A.3864-a/S.568, which would create a community housing waiting list in the Office of Mental Health Services. New York state does not currently keep a record of the demand for such housing, and the bill, if enacted, would make it easier for those with psychiatric disabilities to enjoy a community setting, rather than living in large, often segregated adult homes.

The bills are sponsored in the Assembly by Peter Rivera, D-Bronx, and by Morahan in the Senate. Morahan's was passed in May. Similar legislation passed in both houses last year but were vetoed by former Gov. George E. Pataki.

“Without a list of who wants housing, it will be impossible for the Office of Mental Health to keep their promise to help people living in adult homes move into more independent housing,” said Gary Levine, community organizer for the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled and a former adult home resident.

“As chair of the Senate’s mental health and developmental disabilities committee, final passage and signing of the mental health housing waiting list continues to be a major priority. This legislation relates a waiting list for those with psychiatric disabilities and is similar to the waiting list successfully used by the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. I welcome the New York State coalition for Adult Home Reform with respect to their efforts to provide alternative housing for people with mental disabilities,” said Morahan.

Other legislation the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled is pushing for is A.8701/S.5155, sponsored by Assembly health committee Chairman Richard Gottfried, D,WF-Manhattan, and Senate aging committee chairman Martin Golden R,C- Brooklyn, which would improve oversight of adult homes by the Department of Health and provide residents the right to be fully informed about their health, treatment options and medication.