



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RE: ICFMR – Opinion Release

On behalf of 7,700 persons with mental retardation and/or developmental disabilities (MR/DD) across Ohio, providers of MR/DD services are battling to protect these individuals' rights to choose an intermediate care facility (ICF-MR) as home.

An ICF-MR facility is responsible for providing active and aggressive health treatment or rehabilitative services for individuals with mental retardation or related conditions. This includes the challenges of severe or chronic disabilities which impair general intellectual functioning or adaptive behavior.

While they often are referred to as "institutions," Ohio's approximately 350 ICF-MRs range from small homes serving four individuals to homes that are large communities of more than one hundred.

ICF-MR is a federal entitlement program. The availability of this program is a choice for those needing it, but now deeply rooted in a real threat of elimination from the 2005 State Budget effective July 1. As proposed by the current administration, the elimination of the ICF-MR program would deny individuals with MR/DD the right to live in a facility of their choice as assured by federal law.

It is not easy to understand the various funding and programs available for people with mental retardation but it is easy to understand losing one's home and services and having to go unwillingly to an unfamiliar setting...a setting that may not provide adequate services, thus putting their health and safety at risk. For individuals living with challenges this is a double-threat.

Administration officials claim that a new waiver system will give individuals with disabilities and their families more choices when it comes to care and support. They also maintain that it will improve the state's ability to get control of rising Medicaid costs. Yet, there have been no written answers that a replacement waiver will cover all the services and supports of the current ICF-MR program.

Critics argue that eliminating the successful ICF-MR program without taking other important steps to control costs is ludicrous. While the merits of a waiver system are widely recognized and the preferred choice for many people, it is experiencing serious operational difficulties and is in a state of turmoil. Ohio's waiver system is under severe scrutiny by the federal government, which has indicated that it is grossly out of compliance with federal law.

Without appropriate planning, and until an alternative program with comparable resources has been established, elimination of the ICF-MR program could not only jeopardize the health and safety of individuals with MR/DD but it could also cost the state more money as well as shift the financial burden of quality to care to families and County Boards of MR/DD.

The ICF-MR program is not only a choice, it's a necessity. It is simply unacceptable to take this choice away from a population that is part of all of our communities.