



October 19, 2020

To: Human Services Committee, State of Illinois Senate  
From: Progress Center for Independent Living  
Re: Testimony submitted for Subject Matter Hearing on Access to Healthcare

Progress Center is the Center for Independent Living that serves Suburban Cook County. Progress Center is one of 22 centers in Illinois. Each center for independent living is charged with equipping people with disabilities with the tools to be independent. Centers for Independent working with institution residents to transition out of congregate care settings and into their own apartments and homes in less restrictive, independent settings. That work has always been difficult, even with three consent decrees supporting transition. Now, in the midst of the pandemic, because of more obstacles set up by nursing homes and other institutions, transitions are even more difficult. Now, because of the failure of nursing homes and other institutions to protect residents, the work has even more urgency.

Here is some information:

- About 30% of long-term care facility residents in Illinois have been infected by COVID-19 compared to 2.6% of the general population
- Over 50% of Illinois deaths due to COVID-19 occur in long-term care facilities, while residents of these facilities represent less than one percent of the state's population
- Deinstitutionalization during the pandemic can be done. It's been done. Thousands of incarcerated Illinoisans have been released to reduce the populations of prisons and jails (10% statewide, 25% in Cook Co Jail) to mitigate COVID outbreaks. Yet, only one nursing facility resident in the state is known to have been relocated to avoid infection spread
- Emergency evacuation can be done. Almost 1,800 users of homeless shelters in Cook County have been provided temporary alternate living settings. Yet, there has been no plan to temporarily relocate nursing facility residents in Cook County or elsewhere in the state
- Denying nursing facility residents options to relocate to avoid infection while other populations are provided alternate shelters is discriminatory and has contributed to the high infection and deaths rates in the state
- Residents of nursing facilities are constantly forced to violate CDC guidelines for physical distancing and other mitigation practices simply because these

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facilities are operationally  
and structurally inadequate to meet those guidelines

- Medical fragility does not justify a failure to create a plan to evacuate nursing homes and other institutions and keep people in those institutions. Through three consent decrees, Illinois has already committed to moving people out of institutions. Services that support people in institutions can be provided in the community. The pandemic underscores the need to continue transitions and to assign more resources to transitions so that all residents who choose to can be transitioned into safer environments amidst Covid-19.

Progress Center calls on Illinois to take immediate action to protect people in nursing homes and other institutional settings for people with disabilities by creating and implementing emergency evacuation plans.

Gary M. Arnold, Program Director  
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