

TESTIMONY
NEW JERSEY STATE SENATE
STEPHEN KOMNINOS BILL A2503/S516
MAY 15, 2017

Charles A. Carroll
Award-winning Author/Victim's Advocate
240 South Main Street, Ste. J1
West Creek, New Jersey 08092
(609) 879-9350

Good afternoon Honorable members of the Senate. My name is Charles A. Carroll and I wrote the book, *HARD CANDY: Nobody Ever Flies Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It is the true story of my brother and me. When we were children, we were wrongly committed to a nearby developmental center where living conditions were so sadistic, brutal and degrading, that "child abuse" doesn't come close to describing its disgrace.

Before writing the book, I did extensive research on developmental centers and group homes looking for improved conditions, finding instead, ongoing abuses cleverly hidden by manipulated paperwork. And that's why I am here today; to be a voice for victims who are being gagged by bureaucracies insistent on running their operations just short of the Stone Age of Insanity.

For years, developmental centers and group homes displayed their storefronts with manicured lawns and bird chirping sceneries, emitting a public aura of rest, tranquility and safety, but behind closed doors, out of public view, there's been a festering cesspool of pain, filth, degradation, mental and sexual abuse perpetrated by psychopaths, sexual predators, sadists, and pedophiles.

Just this past decade, the U.S. Justice Department investigated more than 430 facilities in 39 states. As a result, tens of thousands of institutionalized persons were found living in dire, often life-threatening conditions. In fact, the very institution where my brother and I were committed, they found 4,400 recorded incidents of injuries to its residents, resident-on-resident assaults, resident on

resident murders, abuse, neglect, wrongful deaths perpetrated by out of control staff, prescribing incorrect drugs, over-medicating residents, failing to comply with fundamental protection, not providing appropriate psychological services, violating its use of restraints, failing to meet individualized health care needs, and violating the constitutional and statutory rights of residents. And surveys since have found that these facilities continue to violate federal health and safety standards and that people with developmental disabilities are still not safe in institutional settings or group homes. Clearly, not having done enough to protect our most vulnerable citizens is complicity and that, in my opinion, is the greater sin.

Until the State of New Jersey certifies caregivers and provides a career path for them, there will be more injuries and deaths. Bill S516 will encourage caregivers, supervisors, and managers, to protect residents, provide transparency in incident reporting and investigations, reporting incidents in a timely manner, and ensure an environment that would not tolerate abuse, neglect, or exploitation of individuals with developmental disabilities.

We must not let releases into group homes be the coup-da-grace of the state's final blow but rather a passage to safety. No longer should the innocent pay a life sentence for the guilty. If Bill S516 is not passed, as sure as I am standing here today as a victim of past childhood abuses, there will be more suffering, casualties, innocence destroyed, and countless injuries by out of control staff.

Finally, allow me to quote the late, Elie Wiesel:

We must always take sides with the victim.
Neutrality helps the oppressor,
never the victim.
Silence encourages the tormentor,
never the tormented.

Thank you Honorable Members of the Senate for allowing me to share my testimony.