

March 18, 2025

Senate Committee on Human Services

Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 811

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for giving us the chance to submit testimony regarding Senate Bill 811. We're adult foster home (AFH) providers, and we're part of SEIU Local 503 (Sublocal 858). We care a lot about the people we look after, and we want to share our thoughts on how this bill could work better for us and the folks we serve.

First off, we want to say that the state doesn't have enough staff or resources right now. If this bill adds more rules, we think the state should focus on helping new providers get started and keeping experienced ones in the system. A lot of us open homes but don't get residents for months because of referral issues. Having extra inspections during this time, when there might not even be anyone living in the home yet, doesn't make sense. It feels like a waste of time for us and for state workers. Plus, many of us already do a 90-day review as part of our provider agreements. Adding more reviews just means more work and less time for us to care for residents. We think it would be better if the state put resources into recruiting and training providers and giving us financial help to stay in this work.

We really like the part of the bill that lets AFHs in "substantial compliance" move to a two-year licensing cycle instead of renewing every year. Annual renewals are tough on us and our residents. They disrupt the home, especially for residents with mental health issues or who need a lot of attention. Moving renewals to every two years would make things calmer and more stable for everyone. It also shows that the state trusts us to do our jobs well. Plus, it would save the state money since they already check on us in other ways, like through case management, audits, and inspections.

Right now, other types of care facilities, like residential care facilities and memory care homes, already have a two-year licensing cycle. We don't see any good reason why AFHs still have annual renewals. Things have changed since AFHs were first started, and we think it's time to treat us the same as other similar care settings. We'd like the bill to move all AFHs to a two-year cycle, not just the ones in "substantial compliance." This would be fairer and make things easier for everyone.

But we need to talk about the term “substantial compliance.” A lot of us are worried about this because it’s not clear what it means. If the whole idea of moving to two-year licensing depends on this term, we need to know exactly what counts as “substantial compliance.” Right now, it feels like it could be used in different ways by different inspectors, and that’s not fair. We think the bill should spell out what counts as a serious violation (like abuse, neglect, or medication errors) and what doesn’t (like small paperwork mistakes). Providers should also have a way to appeal if they think they’ve been unfairly labeled as non-compliant.

We also want to talk about the 120-day inspection for new providers. We get that the state wants to help new providers get started, but we’re worried these inspections could turn into a way to fine us or write us up for small things. We’re not saying inspectors shouldn’t have the power to address serious problems, but the bill should make it clear that these inspections are meant to help us, not punish us. For example, it could say that the goal of the 120-day inspection is to give us advice and help us do our best for residents.

In closing, we support the goals of SB 811, but we hope you’ll think about the challenges we face every day. Moving all AFHs to a two-year licensing cycle, making “substantial compliance” clear and fair, and focusing inspections on support instead of punishment would make a big difference for us and the people we care for. Thank you for listening to us, and we hope you’ll work with us to make this bill the best it can be.

Sincerely,

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