

Adirondack Manor HFA

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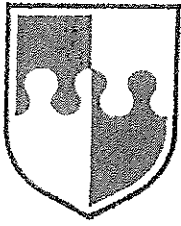
Testimony before the Assembly Committees on Aging, Health and Social Services on Adult Care Facilities

Thursday, September 28, 2017

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My name is Lisa Solazzo and I am the administrator of Valehaven Home for Adults and member of ESAAL. I appreciate the opportunity you have given to me to testify today.

I want to begin my testimony by thanking the members of the panel for their support in passing A6715, which will provide much needed fiscal relief to homes such as Valehaven. Unfortunately, that relief will not come in time for Valehaven, which closed its doors last Friday.

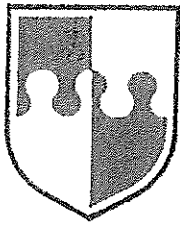
I was the administrator at Valehaven for the last four years. Our owner, Jim Kane, you are probably familiar with. He has owned and operated fourteen SSI homes, but has recently been forced to close several of them, including Valehaven in Oswego.

I want to tell you a little bit about Valehaven so you can understand how incredibly difficult it is to close not just a home, but a community. Because that is what we are to our residents: a community.

Valehaven was licensed for 35 residents. Last year we had between 25 and 35 residents. Our residents were referred to us by Oswego county, Oswego hospital, Catholic Charities, SUNY Upstate, and the VA. We've had many referrals because we are a trusted partner to other providers. We have a small staff of 10, although in my time there, we sometimes had up to 14 people. We have been fortunate to retain our staff throughout difficult periods because we all consider Valehaven to be a part of our own family. So we look out for each other. I personally have covered many shifts to give our staff a break, and if they could, they would have done the same for me.

I typically arrived at Valehaven around 8 am. One or two residents would usually greet me in the parking lot to talk about the night before. It may be about an activity that they had or it might be a complaint about something that happened. The next thing I do is meet with our care coordinator. She and I will discuss anything that happened the night before or during the night. We are required to supervise our residents 24/7, so if something comes up during the night, we will handle it at the time and our care coordinator will bring it to my attention the following morning if we need to follow up. After our meeting, 5-6 residents will want to discuss various issues.

I had an open-door policy at our facility. Although my job requires me to complete paperwork, file reports and keep us in regulatory compliance, I am there for the residents and they are my priority. It is not always easy to do so, because we are a highly regulated industry and a significant amount of my time is ensuring compliance with various rules and regulations. So, after my morning meeting, I will work with our residents. They may want help making their bed.



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Or they may want to work on budgeting. Sometimes I will have to discuss with them their behaviors. Other times, I may plan activities with them. My morning is pretty much spent handling any immediate crisis and whatever remaining time I have, doing various activities with our residents.

In the afternoon I would try to catch up on paperwork and do our afternoon activities. As I have said before, Valehaven is a community. The reason we feel that way is because we foster a shared sense of belonging. We do activities as groups and we try to engage our residents on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual level. For example, we may participate in Resident Counsel meetings, bingo, board games, Food Committee meetings.

Closing Valehaven has been one of the most difficult experiences of my life. But it is even more difficult for our residents. We were approved for closure on June 14th. Since that time, we have been steadily moving residents to other facilities. It has been a very traumatic experience for them. Residents that have moved call constantly. They call us for help with medication or budgeting. They call us promising to be good so they can return home. This is actually fairly common for the displaced residents. They believe they are being punished by our closure. And it breaks my heart.

We have one resident that was with us for 30 years. When it came time to move him, he cried. He thought that we were leaving him to die alone. It felt that way to me too. We had to transfer him to a facility an hour away. He's had difficulty adjusting. He can't sleep so he wanders the halls. It's just a very sad situation.

You see, when we are forced to move our residents, they don't just lose their home; they lose their neighborhood. Every week at Valehaven our local churches stopped in for prayer services. We had several programs that come in daily to entertain or engage our residents. They know the people in the program, they are familiar with them- it gives them comfort to have familiar faces around them. When we moved them out of Valehaven, they lost their community supports. They lose their friends, they lose their pastors, and they lose their caretakers.

And the reason we are closing is clear. We simply do not get reimbursed enough money to care for our residents. In my four years as administrator of Valehaven, we never made a profit that allowed us to hire a full staff. Instead we staffed at the state minimums. We simply had to make do with whatever we could and save money where we could find it.

We have operated on a shoestring budget for as long as I can remember. But we all pitch in to make it work because we're family. But when you have as many obligations for care as we do, with next to nothing to pay for it, it's hard to stay open. And it's getting harder. Without an increase in SSI, I'm afraid many more facilities will be faced with our dilemmas- and our heartbreak.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would welcome any questions you have about Valehaven.