

WESTVIEW MANOR of PEABODY

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February 1, 2012

House Elections Committee

RE: Testimony HB 2437

Mr. Chairman:

I am writing in opposition to HB 2437.

Westview Manor of Peabody is a Nursing Facility for Mental Health. We work with adults with Severe and Persistent Mental Illnesses, such as Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, Major Depression, Personality Disorders, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorders. I have worked with this population for over 11 years.

There are 11 facilities like this in the State of Kansas. We are proud to say that 74.5% of the clients at Westview Manor are registered to vote. However, HB 2437 raises serious access concerns for our population to exercise their right to vote.

Of our 51 residents:

Demographics:

- 9 clients have a current ID card.
- A Birth Certificate is required for an original ID. We have 2 birth certificates.

Access:

- The nearest place to get an ID card is 30 miles round trip; a Tri-care ID or VA ID is 90 miles round trip.
- To be able to obtain an updated ID, an expired ID is required, of which we have 10 expired, 2 VA expired, and 1 Tri-care expired.

- An original ID requires a birth certificate, of which information would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Our clients are poor historians on place of birth, county, mother's maiden name, spellings of names, nor do they have the required proof of who they are to obtain a birth certificate.
- Birth certificates are not "open record" in all states and we have had difficulty obtaining the two we do have that were needed for Medicare eligibility. For example, one was a problem as his parents did not read or write. He had celebrated his sibling's birthday his entire life which made requesting a birth certificate very complicated. The other required guardianship papers, a letter from the guardian and her assistance in phone calls and faxes to obtain the certificate.

Cost:

- The cost of an ID card is \$27. Our clients receive \$62/month in personal spending money.
- The cost of the birth certificate to obtain the ID would also be an additional monetary burden. The cost varies State to State.
- The facility does not provide transportation for ID cards. We are 100% Medicaid and provide all medical transportation but this would be an unfunded courtesy that we could not provide. We take the clients to vote and assist them in voting and registering, but not obtaining ID cards. This would be left up to the family, guardians, etc

Our residents are excited to vote and look forward to it. . We would be happy to confirm their residency in the facility as identification if an exception could be allowed. However, if given the choice between personal needs or an ID card and birth certificate, our voting percentage would decrease. I believe HB 2437 would be an unfair burden on our poor, elderly, disabled, and mentally ill population, as \$62/month does not go far, eliminating their voice to be heard. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bonita Robertson-Boydston, LNHA
Executive Director