

PRESENTATION TO FAMILY ADVOCACY BROOKLYN LEGISLATIVE MEETING
Family Member Testimony, Christina Kirkland
March 13, 2015

My name is Christina Kirkland. I'm here to speak to you on behalf of my aunt Maureen and our family. Maureen is 65-years-old and has a developmental disability that requires her to have 24 hour supervision.

Up until 2 years ago, Maureen had lived with her mother in Sheepshead Bay. It was a good arrangement; as they kept each other company and took good care of each other. When her mother Alice's Urinary Tract Infection turned out to be stage four bladder Cancer, Maureen's world crashed around her.

I remember going over to visit them shortly before Alice fell at home and had to be hospitalized. When I greeted Maureen, she was silently crying over her slice of pizza. When I asked her what was wrong she began to sob inconsolably. She asked me the question "What's going to happen to me?" I was heartbroken because we didn't have an answer.

Maureen's siblings had offered their homes to her but she refused their offers. Maureen was afraid that if she angered whoever she was living with, that they would kick her out of their home, as she had heard this had happened to some of her friends.

What I learned in my research regarding residential services in New York State is that there are more than 13,000 people in New York State who need residential services and it is estimated that more than 6,400 people will need placement within the next 2 years. I also learned that over 75% of individuals with developmental disabilities live with their families and more than 25% of their family care providers are over the age of 60 years old. As these family care providers age, families will need to seek alternative solutions that will provide the level of care needed by their loved ones. I also learned of the increasing longevity of people with developmental disabilities and of the likelihood that they would outlive their parents.

Thankfully, in the fall, one of Maureen's sisters discovered The Guild for Exceptional Children (GEC) in Bay Ridge. This organization was a godsend for our family. Shortly after finding out about the GEC my grandmother passed away. Maureen has had a tough time coping with the new reality. She is still living in her mother's apartment with constant reminders of her mother and her life without her. It doesn't matter how often her family visits, every night Maureen goes to sleep in an empty apartment and wakes up distressed about her future.

Unfortunately, the housing options for Maureen are limited in Brooklyn. I am employed full-time and I can barely afford to live in Brooklyn. So how can society ask those that aren't capable of working to be able to live on their own? Maureen still lives in her mother's apartment but the maintenance is more than her monthly

stipend and her limited inheritance is running out. In another year or two, if the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities cannot provide her with a residential opportunity, where will Maureen be?

Sadly my aunt's story isn't unique. I have learned that, there are individuals being dropped off at emergency rooms and often times these individuals remain in the hospital for extended periods of time. This is because their families or guardians cannot handle the 24 hour level of supervision required and there are not enough residential opportunities available. I am saddened that this may become the reality for many individuals with developmental disabilities.

Thank you.