

Re: Governor Scott's "Emergency" Funding Cut to the Developmentally Disabled

Dear Friend of Angels Unaware, Inc./Ross O'Banion – Executive Director

On Friday, Governor Rick Scott notified every organization that is a provider of services for the Agency for People with Disabilities (APD) in the State of Florida that he issued an "Emergency Order" to SLASH rates that are paid to licensed providers by 15-35%. This was agreed upon between Gov. Scott, APD, and AHCA (Agency for Health Care Administration). A reduction that takes effect IMMEDIATELY WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE!!!!

PLEASE CONTINUE TO READ TO UNDERSTAND THE DEVASTATION THIS WILL CAUSE OUR STATE & THE THOUSANDS OF **DISABLED** INDIVIDUALS IT WILL AFFECT!

Angels Unaware, Inc. is one of the licensed providers for APD and has been operating group homes in Florida, Tampa - Hillsborough area, for over 38 years. We are the 3rd oldest such organization in this area with MacDonald Training Center & Hillsborough Association for Retarded Citizens (HARC) being the oldest. Angels Unaware, Inc provides 8 group homes for 52 consumers including 4 individuals who reside in their own apartment/home (supported living). Angels Unaware, Inc. has a solid reputation of providing quality home-like residential options for the citizens of Florida with Developmental Disabilities that are moderately, severely, or profoundly challenged. Two homes are specifically for the non-ambulatory with medical challenges.

This rate SLASH is due to a shockingly large deficit on the part of APD of \$170 million dollars. This deficit, which exceeds the agency's spending authority by nearly 20%, is partly the legacy of lawsuits (currently there are 19,000 developmentally disabled on a waiting list waiting for services that are engaged in a Class Action Law Suit against the State of Florida) and poor planning by the Legislature..

Last year, when Gov .Charlie Crist was in office, he vetoed a nearly \$20 million rate cut and was quoted as saying that he used his veto powers to stop this cut because it would "**DESTABILIZE**" the entire service delivery system for the developmentally disabled in the state of Florida.

For the last three years we have suffered repeated cuts in rates, services offered & needed, and have experienced increases in unfunded mandates and regulation by APD. This coupled with increases in overhead for normal business costs, such as insurance, unemployment, fuel, etc. had already placed us in a position at the point of barely breaking even or, in fact, losing money. Cash reserves have been eliminated and just this month, our agency took an across the board cut in pay of 8% due to the cuts that we have already received.

**It is clear at this point that, unless something is done immediately, concerning Governor Scott's reckless, careless, and poorly planned actions, many providers across the state will be forced to close the doors immediately (within 30 to 90 days) as cash reserve will be exhausted.**

The waste that he is trying to find does not exist within the service providers. We (the licensed providers) are the people that actually provide the "hands on" physical daily care to the developmentally disabled. Most of our consumers do not have families that are alive or capable of taking over their care. Most have been in group homes for more than 10 years some since they were removed from institutions in the early 1970s.

Providers of these “direct hands on care” services **DID NOT** cause this problem, but it seems that we are ordered to pay the penalty. We have never had a profit margin that could handle a 15-35% reduction!

May I suggest if Governor Scott wishes to cut waste and balance the budget, he should start with any APD Employee that does not provide direct hands on care DAILY! Then continue with any Medicaid Waiver Service that does not do the same. Governor Scott should start cutting at the top, because the people at the bottom that do the REAL WORK (and yes pay the REAL TAXES), can not afford this approach. Most direct care employees are already paid so low that they must work multiple jobs to feed their family.

The developmentally disabled in group homes will not stop needing their daily care just because the Governor signs an “emergency order.” These citizens will still need the same level of care and they will still be the responsibility of the State of Florida. The major difference is they will not be in their home with others they have lived with for years (which is their family) and with care givers that have cared for them and loved them for years. In essence, he is breaking up their only family structure they have ever known. For some this is the only stable family structure they have ever had due to the fact some were removed from their biological parents for cause. As I said, they will still be the responsibility of the state of Florida, only now the start up cost of replacing our homes will far exceed any savings they feel this rate cut will cure for decades to come.

I believe it would be of interest to you to investigate the Governor’s irresponsible actions that will effect this very vulnerable population. What are his plans for this population when the current provider structure statewide collapses as a result of these rate cuts? Why is he cutting the rates paid to the providers who are the ones that deliver the hands on care, when in fact, the people that have consistently controlled the budget and have consistently over spent the budget in our state government are not affected?

Currently there are 19,000 citizens on the waiting list for services, which have filed a class action law suit against the state of Florida. Why is Governor Scott’s focus on cutting the funding for the Developmentally Disabled without solving the real problem of having 19,000 people on the waiting list due to inconsistent and inadequate funding? What are his plans to address this issue now and in the future?

The service providers can no longer absorb the cost of the inadequate leadership that we have been plagued with over the past decade. Maybe our leadership should actually spend a little time in a group home that cares for our states developmentally disabled individuals.

Sincerely:

Ross H. O’Banion Jr.  
Executive Director