

6,500 People

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Six thousand five hundred people – that is the acknowledged death toll in New York’s nursing homes due to COVID-19. It does not count the thousands more who were transferred to and died in a hospital.

But 6,500 deaths didn’t stop Gov. Andrew Cuomo from going on national television and telling people they were safer in a nursing home than they were at home.

We know this isn’t true. We know that studies have found the average life expectancy in a nursing home is five months, while the average person uses personal care or CDPA for five years. We know that folks like Michael Bloomberg – folks with means – will never end up in a nursing home.

So why does the Governor say this? We don’t know. What we know is that while the disability community joins the growing chorus to make billionaires pay slightly more to fund critical services and invest in home care and CDPA, the Governor moves forward with cuts to Medicaid home care services that will cost people their lives.

In the middle of the pandemic, he cut funding for home care worker and PA-wage subsidies by a quarter. Now, the Department of Health is moving forward with regulations putting in place the Medicaid eligibility cuts intended to keep people from qualifying for needed services, delay services for those who still qualify and force the most disabled into nursing homes.

The new regulations require assistance with three or more activities of daily living (ADLs) in order to qualify for home care. They ignore that it is much more cost effective, not to mention humane, to provide minimal services earlier, rather than wait until dramatically more services are needed after people deteriorate.

The regulations require anyone needing over 12 hours a day of services to submit to a “clinical safety review” to make sure they are safe in the community. They ignore multiple checks that take place before the authorization is ever made. They ignore that there is no data that says twelve hours is a magic number where safety in the community becomes threatened. It ignores the reality disabled folks know too well, the reality of Michael Hickson, who despite being a happy husband and father of five was refused treatment because doctors deemed him to have no quality of life solely because he is a quad.

These cuts are happening despite the fact that CDPA solves many of the health disparities the pandemic is forcing Black and Brown New Yorkers from suffering disproportionately from COVID. While the primary factor determining how many people died in a nursing home was the percentage of non-white residents, CDPA was resolving these issues. Language barriers, a lack of cultural awareness, hesitance to engage with the health care community and numerous other factors are eliminated when we put people in charge of who provides their services and how they are provided.

Instead of investing more in home care, and CDPA in particular, Gov. Cuomo is intent on protecting his billionaire friends. Instead of taxing the second and third homes of billionaires, or their yachts, Gov. Cuomo is choosing to tax us. Because make no mistake, the half billion dollars cut from home care and CDPA are a tax on disabled and senior New Yorkers trying to stay home and stay safe.

We can still fight. The regulations are not final. If you want to find out more and send your comments to the Department of Health, the law forces them to listen and respond. And we’ve made it easy for you. Go to www.StopLTCCuts.org. There you can read more about the new regulations and find out how to fight them.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” But justice delayed is justice denied. CDPAANYS is committed to bending that arc a little faster because we will not be denied justice. Please join us in the fight.