

## Northwest Advisory Council Report February 25, 2004

Good evening, President Sasiadek, members of the Board and Dr. Hairston,

The Northwest Advisory Council met on Tuesday, February 17, 2004 at Wellwood International Elementary School. The topic centered on group homes and the impact in our area. Delegates, Adrienne Jones, Bobby Zirkin and Senator Delores Kelley came from Annapolis to discuss legislation that they are working on to help alleviate the problem. Joining us also were Jean Satterfield who talked about the secondary transition center and Dr. Ella White Campbell a Community Activist who is very knowledgeable about the group home issue.

Delegate Zirkin spoke to the issues of the entire child welfare system as well as group homes. He has several bills pending to help change the entire program. The state run facilities would be replaced with forty bed or fewer facilities. The large institutions would be eliminated. The money for each child would go to the school in the area that child is attending. The children would be placed as close to their families as treatment calls for it. Qualifications of the childcare workers would be raised and a legal standard for placement of children would be instituted. The group home providers would be held accountable with outcomes and evaluations. They would be expected to participate in the child's schooling and act as a surrogate parent by attending parent conferences, making sure homework is completed, etc.

Senator Kelley crossed filed a bill with Delegate Jones to put in a system of evaluation, tracking and accountability to measure how effective the programs are. The problems now with the group homes are many. Group homes and foster homes come under different agencies. Group homes are expected to meet the needs of the children but no follow-up is available. The placement of children has become an issue because violent offenders can and often are placed with children who have other issues. Again the funding is being asked to move to the school with the child.

Delegate Jones addressed the issue of community activism with regard to group homes. She encouraged the audience to email, call and write legislators about the issues. The legislators need to hear from the public so they know what their constituents want.

Ms Satterfield spoke about the secondary transition center being planned for next year. The center will help those students fourteen years and older to transition into the school system. The initial screening and tracking down student records would take place while the child is getting services and the Baltimore County Curriculum at the center. Since many of these students exhibit significant challenges, their many issues would be addressed at the center.

Our last speaker was Dr. Campbell. She stressed the impact these group homes are having on the community and the schools. She implored the community to fight for the extra resources needed especially in the northwest and southwest areas of the county.

It was evident from the questions the audience posed during the discussion that the group homes issue is a large concern in our community. People want to know what they can do to help improve the problems posed by the multitude of homes in our area and how to keep the problem from getting worse. Training and certification programs are imperative. Accountability of the group homeowners and caregivers is essential. We hope the transition high school center will help the students, but we also understand that with more and more of these homes being added to the community that it will take legislation to address the overriding issues.

Northwest Advisory Council  
Abby Beytin, Chair