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FLOOR DEBATE

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would be a disservice to these individuals to say that all mentally ill or all developmentally disabled people should reside in secure facilities. While we acknowledge that group homes have a place in our communities, there is a difference between residents who simply need guidance, care and supervision in their daily activities, and those with violent or predatory propensities. It is amazing to us that a business cannot sell liquor within 100 yards of a residential neighborhood, yet, a business, such as ACT, can house violent offenders and sexual predators in that same neighborhood. And I didn't tell you the whole story. We are asking, pleading with you, to carefully consider the decision you will make tomorrow, meaning today. There has to be a system of checks and balances in place before allowing these facilities to close. We need to feel safe. Right now, our family and the people in our neighborhood do not feel safe, and we won't feel safe until we know there are regulations and policies in place for these group homes. We also need the assurance of knowing there will be adequate funding to ensure that there will be competent staff who are thoroughly trained and licensed. For obvious reasons, the pending mental health bill is of particular interest to us in a very personal but very real way. However, our concerns are undoubtedly the concerns of citizens across the state who elect state senators to act in interests of public health, welfare, and safety. Thank you for the opportunity to voice our concerns. Just to tell you a little bit more about this incident, this...these clients, there were...or residents, however you want to describe them, there were six of them. They were living in a duplex, three on each side. There were three staff members for these six residents. There has to be one for each two residents. On the day this incident occurred, even though these clients are supposed to be supervised full-time, two of the supervisors had gone on errands with three of the clients in two different vehicles. That left one staff member who had two clients on one side of the duplex and one on the other side, but he was totally unaware that the other two staffers had left. And he was only accidentally over in the other duplex on the other side because he went to look for his cell phone, and that's when he heard the little boy crying. Now, that should never have happened. Our rules and regs say it should never have happened. But I think that we need to focus