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**Testimony of Paul Aronsohn,
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New Jersey Assembly Committee on Human Services
Thursday, October 22, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Downey and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for holding this very important hearing and for inviting so many individuals and families to be a part of this difficult, yet necessary conversation. I know that there is limited time today to provide in-person testimony, but it was good of you to encourage as much written testimony as possible.

Clearly, this is an issue-area that our state government takes very seriously, and over the years, steps have been taken to minimize, if not outright eliminate, abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities in group homes and other congregate care facilities. The implementation of the Stephen Komninos Law, beginning in 2018, is just one of the most recent, most sweeping examples of the efforts that have been made in this regard.

Yet, we know that abuse and neglect still exist, and the testimonies presented today will speak to that ugly truth. We also know that there may be a very fine line between abuse and neglect. For some, neglect is arguably its own form of abuse.

My hope, therefore, is that today's hearing will be an important milestone in our collective efforts – across our two branches of government – to fix that which is broken and to make safer our system of care for people with disabilities. That might mean more oversight. That might mean more training. That might mean more use of monitoring technology. Or that might mean some combination of all of the above.

Regardless, at a minimum, it should mean more transparency with respect to investigations into abuse and neglect. Present practice is for allegations to be investigated, but not fully shared with the public or even the individuals or families involved.

More transparency would be the right thing to do as well as the smart thing to do.

- The right thing, because individuals and families deserve to know the details of any such investigation involving them or their loved one.
- The smart thing, because such investigative reports provide us all with opportunities to learn, to improve and to make necessary changes.

Again, today's hearing is providing a platform to jumpstart a difficult, yet necessary conversation – one that is long overdue, one that will hopefully move us closer to ending abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities. Suffice it to say, we can't get there soon enough.

Thank you.