Good morning, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Marian Baldini, and I started working in the human services field in 1977, with the goal of seeing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities served in community settings. I have over 45 years of leadership in the human services industry, and currently serve as the CEO and President of KenCrest. For over 114 years we have dedicated ourselves to supporting children and adults with intellectual disabilities and provide a wide range of services in Pennsylvania to over 12,500 people annually. We currently have 150 community group homes, and we serve as one of the largest providers of life sharing for adults in Pennsylvania. Our mission is to help those we serve to thrive as our neighbors, with or near their families, and receive support in their own homes through positive, person-centered, and family-centric approaches and inclusion.

Throughout my career I have been responsible for transitions for multiple institutions—including Elwyn, Pennhurst, Embreeville, and the Hamburg Center. The teams that I have led have invested countless hours into ensuring that these transitions have been impactful and effective.

It’s been more than a few years since we started the work, in support of the transition for the residents at the Hamburg Center. KenCrest was one of many providers who responded to the request to support these transitions into community living. Our success in supporting people who have significant health concerns was of great interest to the team from the Office of Developmental Programs. At the time, KenCrest already operated four highly specialized homes for individuals with complex medical needs, needs requiring 24/7 nursing care; for children and adults. The process, which was rolled out by ODP, engaged us with the families right away. Proposals were submitted expressing our interest and our capacity to serve; and families would need to approve them.

We shared with families what we had to offer. We think it is important to share the results of those early conversations. One family was immediately interested in the proposal. Most were skeptical. Some were willing to see if what we could offer would meet their expectations. Many had a long-standing, trusted relationship with the social worker at Hamburg, and the social worker visited on behalf of those families. All of the families who saw what we had to offer or consulted with the social worker, agreed to consider our proposals.

Creating the proposals gave us time to get to know the individual’s needs, to talk with staff, review records, and become truly confident that we could make a difference in these folks’ lives.

We drafted ten proposals, and eight of the families accepted our proposals. After we received their approval, we deployed a team of nurses and professional staff to continue visits and follow along with the Hamburg staff. This assured our leadership and the team at ODP that we would stay current on each individual’s needs while we prepared their new homes. The
transition was successful because of the full level of support and care from the staff at Hamburg and the leadership at ODP.

Since then, many of these individuals have progressed in their health and social interactions; we’re discovering new things about them every day, and their community has rallied around them. All of the residents have strengthened their connections with their families. We’re expecting trick-or-treaters again this year at all of the homes and will give out candy while encouraging and educating our neighbors on the care being provided for each of the residents; and the value of life of the people who are different, but important to all of us.

We know how to staff these homes, we have nurses present 24/7, and we have a primary physician who learns the needs of these folks before they arrive, and makes old-fashioned house calls as needed. We know how to adapt environments to support complex needs and still look like a welcoming home.

I understand that weighing conflicting interests is difficult, and we know that some of these choices simply were not available in the past. I have lost track of the number of parents who have told me that they were advised that an institution was the right choice or the only choice. We have learned and developed since those days, and we know the very real value of inclusion.

What matters most in this transition planning is learning...discovering what is possible and mobilizing our resources to create something special. We accept the responsibility to ensure that everyone in our care—no matter their ability—is supported in living out their lives in the most meaningful and fulfilling way. This includes increasing and empowering their ability for choice, immersing them into the community, and most importantly providing a place to be close enough to spend more time with their families. We were excited to hear that key state center staff who successfully supported people at Hamburg and their families, were included in the team to plan for Polk and Whitehaven.

We invite the members of the committee to visit KenCrest’s community medical homes to see what community living has meant for the individuals we support and their families. Over the past year, we’ve had multiple legislators visit these homes and each was extremely impressed with the level of high-quality services and opportunities KenCrest provides.

On behalf of KenCrest, I thank you for your time and for allowing me to lend a voice to the success of those who are now living as our neighbors.