



Mentally ill need safe, affordable housing

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The severe shortage of adequate housing for people living with mental illnesses was highlighted in an Oct. 5 article "Poll suggests Spitzer runaway in gubernatorial race."

The people of New York state are calling on the next governor to support a common-sense plan for reforming the state's housing policies for the mentally ill.

As a parent and a long-time advocate for the rights of people with mental illnesses, I hope that the candidates will address the issue of mental health housing in the campaign.

People living with mental illnesses have the chance to lead productive lives if they have a decent home to live in and access to supportive services. Many people with mental illnesses live with aging parents. Often, these are people who are capable of living on their own if they have access to services like counseling and job training.

But the reality is that right now in New York, the supply of supportive housing cannot begin to keep up with the demand. That means people are cycled in and out of emergency shelters, hospitals, adult homes and homelessness.

New York needs to redirect the dollars that go toward these services of last resort for mentally ill people into safe, affordable housing that provides a chance of recovery. That means developing more housing units and preserving the ones we have. And it means establishing a statewide waiting list to accurately track what works and what is needed. The families of people with mental illnesses need more options. Right now, we are just hoping against hope that our children and our loved ones do not end homeless when we're gone.

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