

Supporting People with Disabilities since 1989

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Assemblyman Chivukula Shows Support of Disability Awareness at a Community Options Group Home Visit

PRINCETON, NJ- Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula once again displayed his continued support of disability awareness when he toured a Community Options group home this past week. On Tuesday, June 11th, Chivukula visited with residents at their group home in the Monroe community in order to get a better understanding of the community supports available to individuals with disabilities.

Community Options is a nonprofit organization that provides housing and employment supports to individuals with disabilities in integrated community settings. Housing supports are often in the form of group homes, which are private residences designed to serve individuals with disabilities, typically with no more than four residents in a home and continual assistance from trained caregivers.

The movement of de-institutionalization is growing as people are starting to see that having a disability should not prevent someone from living and working in the community. Governor Chris Christie along with the legislature created The Task Force on the Closure of State Developmental Centers and gave the five-member panel the power to make binding decisions. The task force ultimately decided to close North Jersey Developmental Center in Totowa and Woodbridge Developmental Center. As institutions begin to close many are turning to community placement in the form of group homes, which can provide a new and enriching experience that can lead to a more independent and inclusive life.

The group home Chivukula toured this past Tuesday is the home to three men, Abhi, Richard and Robert who found new lives when they moved into the house, in 2001, 2006 and 2007 respectively. Like many who live in the community, these men faced Hurricane Irene and witnessed the flooding of their home. The home was completely destroyed and the men had to be evacuated by boat. They relocated for a year and a half while the house was gutted and renovated. According to Maria Bowles, the Executive Director of Community Options, "This is their home, so this was a major adjustment for them," but it is just one example of the many growing and learning experiences individuals can gain when they have a chance at life in the community.

Chivukula has long advocated for disability rights and awareness. He remarked that despite the devastation of the house after Irene, there is a silver lining in the fact that the renovations allowed for improvements such as all tile floors and a larger, wheelchair accessible shower. According to Bowles, "Upendra is a dynamic speaker and great community leader. He spoke at the Cupid's Chase 5K run this past year, which is our annual event held each Valentine's Day weekend, and showed his support. When he says he is going to be somewhere he is there; I know he has a busy schedule but he really is a man of his word."



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Options Inc. (COI) is a national nonprofit organization incorporated in 1989 and headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey. The organization provides residential and employment supports to people with disabilities. The agency philosophy is that all people can and should live and work in the community, regardless of their level of disability. COI currently operates in Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. For more info please visit www.comop.org.

CEO available for comment. Photos available upon request. If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please call (609) 352-5280 or e-mail Kathryn at Kathryn.Sampson@comop.org.