

## Clark: Adult day health services worth preserving

**By State Senator Katherine Clark**

This past week, I visited Bridgewell's Adult Day Health Services in Melrose. Bridgewell is one of many organizations throughout the Commonwealth and the senate district that offers comprehensive services and programs for individuals with psychiatric, physical, and developmentally disabilities. Many individuals in these programs depend on services for maintaining quality of life and promoting independence. Others depend on services and staff assistance for providing basic needs such as eating, bathing, and dressing.

Adult Day Health Services (ADHS) save the state millions of dollars by providing a cost efficient alternative to expensive nursing home and hospital care. These programs allow elders and the disabled to get the services and treatments they need while remaining in the comfort of their own homes. Day habilitation programs provide relief to the many caretakers who send their loved ones to programs while they are at work. Other programs, like the Bridgewell group home I visited in Wakefield, offer an opportunity for comfortable, independent living in a private home setting.

The ADHS rely on state funding to state afloat. Recently, the administration proposed a cut in the rates to these programs that would have destabilized programs and forced many to close. There was an outpouring of testimony from providers and legislators in opposition. As a result, last week the administration postponed the rate cuts in order to study their effect on these statewide programs.

While these cost efficient services result in significant long-term savings for the state, they are still in jeopardy in the upcoming budget. Estimates show that it costs the state an average of \$72,000/year to pay for nursing home care compared to \$15,000/year for ADHS. For less than \$54 per day, ADHS programs are gatekeepers to more expensive health care settings and provide care for six to eight hours a day, complete with registered nursing care, chronic disease management, medication administration and management, access to social workers, therapies, two meals, transportation and assistance with activities of daily living.

According to Susan Craven, the Clinical Director of Day Services at Bridgewell, any more cuts will be devastating. Craven says decreased funding will not only affect the delivery of services, but also the safety of their members. "All citizens should be afforded the opportunity to attend programs that will promote their health, wellness, and safety while promoting good quality of life and independence," said Craven.

Budget cuts may also reduce the number of operation hours in the day programs. That could mean that working families would have to quit their jobs or reduce their work hours in order to care for their family members at home.

We must invest in these critical programs on behalf of our most vulnerable population. Adult Day Health Services must have adequate funding as they work to maintain the programs and services aimed at promoting independence in communication, self care, independent living skills, sensory motor awareness, and socialization skill building. There will be many tough choices in the upcoming budget, but ADHS programs are a worthy investment.