

## **An Open Letter**

**On**

### **State Developmental Center and Shelter Workshop Closure**

3/12/2015

**COMMITTEE:** Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

**CHAIR:** Representative Robert Cole Sprague

The State of Ohio is engaging in the process of closing State Developmental Centers (DCs) as well as the shelter workshops and significantly downsizing Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) that serve the Developmentally Disabled/Delayed (DD) population. Director John Martin, Department of Developmental Disabilities (DoDD), announced his decision to close the Montgomery Development Center and Youngstown Center by June of 2017 at a public meeting at the Montgomery Developmental Center in Huber Heights Ohio on February 14, 2015.

The centers serve clients who do not function well at home or in a group home setting and who may have even been placed into the DCs for care by the judicial system because they do not function well in the community, yet who do not need to be in a prison or jail. These DCs offer the least restrictive yet "controlled / safest" setting that allows many of the residents to function as best as they can given their developmental levels and behavior issues. The DCs allow them to contribute as much as they can, to society, in the day programs and workshops, and the DD population as well as learn as much as they can about social interactions and appropriate behaviors, in an atmosphere that does not demean, degrade, victimize, or discriminate against them, and they feel accomplished in the process.

If the DCs are closed, the residents of these facilities will then be placed back into the community in which they cannot function while also having the workshops they attend being taken away from them. Needless to say, this is going to be very stressful and possibly behavioral triggering for many of these unfortunate individuals. When these behaviors occur the only options that will be left for the group homes, because of available staffing, will be for them to call the police and have the individual placed into a mental health lock up for 72 hours, if not jail, and then eventually the individual being placed into a locked down unit of a nursing home because the group home can not handle them because of training and staffing issues. This is where the DCs play such a vital role in the Ohio Mental Health system. If they are closed there will be no supports and loss of most all of their freedoms that they have now - no safety net for our most vulnerable and fragile citizens. The probate judges will lose an important tool to help these individuals secure help and who are not suited or in need of incarceration in the penal system where they will yet be victimized again.

Disability Rights of Ohio (DRO), a federally-funded organization, does not speak for the mentally disabled citizens residing in DCs/ICFs. This action by Director Martin and the DoDD, under the guise of agreeing with DRO views, is unconscionable and totally devastating to the current mental health program in the State of Ohio and effectively dismantles all of the good that has been done in Ohio to improve the care of the most innocent and vulnerable citizens who cannot fully care for themselves.

I find the move by Mr. Martin to be egregious and in violation of the civil rights of citizens with developmental disabilities by not allowing them to have the best opportunity for their continued progress and life. This is being done by "one man" who told the families and staff of the Montgomery Developmental Center in a face-to-face meeting on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 (Valentines Day) that he was the one who made the decision to close the centers, and he was not going to change his mind because it was all about economics, and that he is saving the State of Ohio 8 million dollars. However I understand that he then he changed the figure to be 6 million dollars when he testified at the Finance Subcommittee for Health and Human Services hearing on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Mr. Martin's intent is not in the best interest or safety of the individuals, or community at large. What you must be cautious of is the numbers that he has presented as savings for the State, and of comments that he has made about other states and trends of eliminating "institutions." He has strategic plans to close all "institutions" and to stop independent providers from having group homes or facilities to care for the DD population in the community. He said the current independent provider licenses will not be renewed when they expire. He also stated funding for the ICFMR waivers, which allows some of the DD citizens to live in group homes (if the individual is able to function in a group home) or in state operated facilities will no longer be available except to those who have it, and if they lose it, somehow, they will not be able to regain it. So then what happens to this individual and family?

Furthermore, Mr. Martin stated at the meeting on February 14, 2015, and from what I understand also during his testimony before Finance Subcommittee for Health and Human Services, the reason for closing the Montgomery Development Center and the Youngstown Center is due to a decrease in the number of residents being served in the DCs across the State of Ohio. He said there were 1,600 individuals living in ten centers, and today only 900 living in these ten centers. He said the decreased demand in recent years has resulted in the cost increase for each individual being served in the DCs. When in fact over two years ago, when the Montgomery Developmental Center was full, they were told to start downsizing and placing residents back into their homes or community.

There was no decrease in demand. The center was ordered to decrease the population of the residents who were being positively served by the center.

My understanding is that Ohio has not allowed admission into the DCs in the last few years. The only allowed admission into these facilities is through court probate on a temporary basis and even if this was not the case the center was full. I and my wife were told by different facility superintendents that they had been told to close houses on the

campus and move residents back home or into the community. Yes they are now aware that some of those who had been removed from the center and back into the community are failing to function well and need to come back to a developmental center setting where they were functioning well or better – but now there is no place to go back to. Where are these individual going to end up? In jail and get victimized, or on the street as homeless and unable to care for themselves, or in a locked down unit of a nursing home that is ill equipped to let them live a least restrictive full meaningful life as then can and a life at the level they now have at the developmental centers.

Representatives, everyone is being affected by this. Those who are receiving services and those who will be living next to these “community-based homes” (as long as they exist), the employees of the centers and their families, and the residents’ families whose lives will now be placed in more chaos than they are already in dealing with a family member who is suffering from mental illness or brain injury.

I ask that the committee consider how the families of those who are now living in the center may be faced with not being able to provide for the family member or charge on a 24 hour basis physically, or be able to pay for the additional care needed, and then they will have to quite their job, or be fired because of the care demands, and so instead of having on person on the “state dole” there will now be the care givers in addition to the existing client and any other dependants of the care giver. Then consider the loss of their home because of the lack of income for mortgage, insurance, upkeep etc. So now instead of asking where one individual goes the question is where does the whole family go?

How is all of this saving the state money and helping the client? If these closures, and removal of funding, are allowed to happen, the results will be horrible and the long term damage will be unfathomable. In my opinion this will amount to dismantling the working (though not perfect) mental health system that we have in the State of Ohio, setting Ohio back decades.

Respectfully,

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