

Chair Smith and Members of the Finance Committee, my name is Ora Davidson of New Madison, Ohio. I want to thank the Committee for allowing me a chance to speak on the closure of Ohio's developmental centers. First, I want to give you our sincere thanks for including the closure commission language in the substitute bill. It is our hope that the language will bring extra scrutiny and thoughtfulness to a DC closure. Ultimately, it is our hope, of course, that the commission will put a stop to these closures. I thank this committee on behalf of dozens and dozens of parents and family members whose loved ones live in the 10 state operated Developmental Centers. With your actions, you have proved that you are true advocates for the most vulnerable in our state.

As I testified earlier, my son Marlon Davidson, lives in the Montgomery Development Center in Huber Heights. He is 46 years old and has the IQ of an 18-month old baby. He has profound Mental Disabilities. Marlon cannot talk except in one letter words and they are few. He can't tell you if he has pain, hunger, hot or cold. He has seizures, he's in a wheelchair, wears AFO's (braces) to support his ankles for pivoting. He has no teeth and his food has to be ground.

This will be the third Developmental Center Marlon will have lived in. He lived at Springview Developmental Center most of his life. Before that he was at Orient briefly. Every time he's put in another center, it's so traumatic. We'll never know how hard it is on him and other individuals who are forced to move. On Marlon, he begins having seizure activity and that damages his brain. Every time he's moved, he becomes worse, unstable, and it's harder to recover. We'll never know how many even died from the last closures of Springview and Applecreek, or how many were permanently traumatized and never fully recovered.

On top of the trauma, every time he's put into another center, that's another child who has to be moved out of the receiving DC. It's a domino effect to make room for him. Typically the ones who are moving out of the state-operated DCs have no family and have a public guardian, appointed by the state. APSI guardians may have 4 to 6 individuals or more. They can move them anytime they want....and they do.

We know the Department of Developmental Disabilities has told this committee that families aren't choosing DCs anymore. Well I'm here to tell you, as are all these parents, that that is absolutely not true. Instead, DODD has been moving individuals with APSI guardians or refusing to fill beds after individuals die or move out, when other families need help. We don't think that's right. It's wrong and it has to stop. The only time DODD is allowing admissions is when probate judges force the issue or they finally get probated in.

I'm 71 years old and have had 2 heart attacks with a 5 by-pass surgery. What's going to happen when I can no longer be his guardian? This is the question on every parent and guardian's mind.

Marlon sees no danger and will escape any door he finds open. This has happened with washing machines and he has gotten into a dryer. Marlon is unable to meet his own basic needs such as dressing, bathing and meal preparation. He is unable to defend himself or report harm. Because of this, Marlon is best served in a state-operated Development Center where they can keep a medical eye on him, the oversight is greater and where caregivers are long-time employees that know Marlon like family. That is irreplaceable to parents. In the private sector the turnover is so great staff struggle to know the kids or their conditions. At MDC, the same staff have been there ever since we got there 10 years ago. They know Marlon. He's their family and he treats them that way too.

The Department has told MDC and YDC families we can move into another DC or ICF. Well, we've been in three DCs already. How can we trust that the next one won't close? They're also said we can move into another ICF? Yet the department is closing those beds, too.

Ohio and other states are following a trend to close developmental centers, so says DODD. But should Ohio follow this trend even if it is a bad one? Why jeopardize the state's most vulnerable people just because other states are doing it? It is our hope that the closure commission language that you included in the sub bill was created to call this trend into question. Let's not just follow the pack. Let's make Ohio a trend setter.

I thank you again on behalf of the DC parents in this state for all that you have done and I hope to work with you on instituting the next closure commission. Thank you and my son, Marlon Davidson, appreciates you.

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