

Testimony before House Finance Committee
Chair Smith, Ranking Member Driehaus
By William "Monty" Blanton
May 3, 2016

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Driehaus and members of the House Finance Committee. I want to thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Monty Blanton and I'm a longtime state employee. I worked at Gallipolis Developmental Center for 32 years. I'm currently the lead staff for the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association on issues regarding the state developmental centers. Our organization represents most state employees, including the majority of employees at the 10 centers.

First, I want to thank this committee and all members of the General Assembly who supported the Closure Commission language last year. Even though we weren't able to prevail, your commitment to ensuring the health and safety of individuals with developmental disabilities doesn't go unrecognized.

It's been approximately one year since the announced closures of Youngstown and Montgomery Developmental Centers. I think it's important to look back and take stock of where we

are now. While we appreciate Director Martin's planning these transitions over a period of two years to allow time for more successful placements, there are still some very complicated individuals who have had a very difficult time during the transition. Some have moved from place to and place, and others have failed to thrive at all in the move. Additionally, for many family members, there are no other appropriate settings for their loved ones and they are simply waiting out their time. At which time they will move to another DC.

In the cases of individuals failing in their new settings, there is little information on how or why they failed to thrive. We know of too many who have left a DC and then ping ponged around the system from place to place. Some have been hospitalized. Some wandered away from their residents and were missing for a period. Some became violent and could not be controlled. Some have even been detained or arrested. Others have died.

In some of these cases, a waiver setting simply was not sufficient to address the individuals' needs. So in a crisis, these individuals were moved to hospitals, mental health facilities, nursing homes or other DCs. As you know, waiver services do not include comprehensive services and supports for some of

these complicated individuals with high medical or behavioral needs that can be found in an ICF/DD like a DC.

In an effort to ensure the health and safety of ALL individuals moving from state developmental centers slated for closure regardless of their disability, we urge this committee to take legislative action to track individuals since the announced closures and moving forward. This tracking would offer a “look back” at where individuals went and whether or not they were successful. It would provide a mechanism moving forward to ensure individuals’ health and safety.

We believe that the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities should prepare and provide a comprehensive report detailing the following:

- any deaths that have occurred in the moves
- reports of significant bodily injury and/or MUIs
- hospital, mental health facility or nursing home stays
- detainment or arrest by law enforcement
- the pattern of movement from setting to setting.
- Any other documents or information regarding the movement or placement of individuals that the legislature deems necessary.

Such tracking and report will accomplish several goals:

- Ensure the health and safety of those who have moved.
- Ensure the health and safety of those that will move.
- Give parents and guardians peace of mind that everything is being done to ensure their loved ones are safe in their transitions, and are provided settings that are medically and behaviorally appropriate.
- Ensure accountability from DODD, providers and other stakeholders.
- Measure the success of incentives for waiver providers to take individuals from DCs.

Such a report should not be difficult for DODD to produce, given their expressed commitment to tracking individuals during the closure announcement. In order to ensure individuals are protected, we believe the report should be made available this body within six months, and until that time, no movement to new residential settings should take place from the DCs slated for closure.

We also would welcome further conversations with lawmakers and other stakeholders regarding similar legislative action that

would ensure this level of accountability when *any* individuals are moved to new settings from *any* of the state-operated developmental centers.

In his testimony before the legislature last year, Director Martin said the following about the changes being proposed to move individuals to other settings:

“And it should be viewed with the knowledge that change is difficult when looked at through the front windshield, but often is satisfying as we look through the rear view mirror.”

It is our hope that a transition report would allow for a good, hard look through the rear view mirror to see where we've been and whether or not the moves have been successful.....so that moving forward Ohio's most vulnerable are safe and thriving.

Thank you for your time today and I would entertain any questions at this time.