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Let me first thank you for the opportunity of addressing this committee regarding our development centers and why they are essential.

My name is Isabelle DeRosa. I am 85 years old and am physically unable to personally appear before you. My son Philip is 54, is profoundly mentally retarded and has been a resident of the Fernald Development Center in Waltham for 40 years. I have spent the majority of my life dealing with the DMR fighting for the life, health and safety of my son. So I speak from experience.

As I gathered my thoughts for this testimony, I realized that in my lifetime I have weathered many difficult times. I grew up during the great depression, lost my mother when I was a young child, made it through a world war, suffered the loss of two of my other children and more recently the loss of my husband. All of these pale when compared to the most difficult thing I have ever done in my life...the gut-wrenching decision to place my son in Fernald during the late 1960s. After years of medical evaluations and endlessly searching for schools, groups, tutors or any kind of program that could help him, we were faced with the reality that there were none. Fernald was the only option. Philip was 14 when our family could no longer meet the physical demands of caring for him.

At that time the Fernald was a human warehouse, nothing more. The next few years were filled with an agony and heartache only a parent in this situation can begin to comprehend. Haunted by thoughts of what I had done. Sleepless nights, endless soul searching, daily trips to Waltham to ensure Philip was still in one piece and constant battles with the then Fernald administration for basic human rights. I seriously doubted my son would even survive. I knew I would no doubt burn in hell for all eternity for the misery-filled existence I had condemned my son to.

But, they say every black cloud has a silver lining. The silver lining for this particular black cloud came in the form a tenacious parent, the late Mr. Ben Ricci, who refused to accept these deplorable conditions. His attorney, Beryl Cohen, who was willing to accept this great legal challenge to fight for basic human rights and the extreme good fortune to land in the courtroom of Judge Joseph Tauro. A judge with compassion, integrity, morality and the courage to call the system what it was, **AN ABOMINATION**, and the willingness to accept the monumental task of totally reforming the care and treatment of the mentally retarded.

At that moment my agony began to subside. There was a new vision of this system. A system where my son was recognized as a human being with individual capabilities and unique medical needs. This judge also had the great wisdom to recognize that "one size does not fit all". A fact

recently recognized in the Olmstead ruling and incorporated that fact in the new system.

Over the years, Fernald has developed into its own community. Long past the "wards" to cottages and apartments arranged in a neighborhood and a routine schedule of activities and staff tailored to each individual's abilities and needs. It has taken years for Philip to become comfortable with everything--the buildings, the routine, the staff and his housemates. The uniqueness of the Fernald facility (like the other centers) allows him to fully participate in these activities all within its protected environment that is critical to his life and safety. There are trips into the surrounding community that he enjoys but I am certain he is always happiest when he returns to the familiar surroundings and security of his home.

Philip has been at Fernald for 40+ years. It has taken most of those years for him to reach this comfort level and the quality of life he now truly enjoys. The key words here are A LIFE NOT JUST AN EXISTENCE. He is HAPPY, HEALTHY AND SAFE. He lives a life that is as close to the "real world" as his limited abilities will allow. Something I never thought possible or even allowed myself to hope for 40 years ago. I don't believe has another 40 years to struggle with becoming comfortable in a new location that can't possibly offer the level of care, availability of facilities and activities, and the intangibles--happiness and sense of security-- he has at Fernald and it is completely inhumane and cruel to force this upon him and the rest of his Fernald family.

The comprehensive services provided by our development centers did not happen overnight. It has taken years of hard work and many taxpayer dollars to develop this level of expertise that is not available anywhere else. When it's gone it's gone. It can't be duplicated. These services are critical to the people who rely on them for the daily existence.

**DO NOT ALLOW THIS ADMINISTRATION TO DISMANTLE WHAT HAS TAKEN DECADES TO BUILD. DO NOT ALLOW THIS ADMINISTRATION TO DE-VALUE HUMAN LIFE. Please have the moral courage and human decency to stop THIS ABOMINATION.**

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Isabelle M. DeRosa