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May 12, 2009

We appreciate this opportunity to express our concerns to this committee regarding our development centers, the vital services they provide and ultimately the fate of the residents that rely on these centers for their lives. Our brother Philip DeRosa is 54 years old and has been a resident of the Fernald Development Center for 40 years.

It was our original intention to state the incredibly obvious reasons why the continued existence of our development centers are of paramount importance. Anyone with eyes, common sense, and a shred of human decency already knows the reasons. It has all been said so many times before. With rare exception, the cries of the guardians have fallen on deaf ears. To add to the altruistic speeches seemed pointless.

We decided, instead to use this opportunity to submit a few basic fundamentals for your consideration that have somehow been lost in the shuffle or obscured by the smoke and mirrors in this long battle. When you sift your way through the endless self-serving speeches and mountains of information (both accurate and inaccurate) three very simple concepts are constant. Choice, money and greed.

Decades ago, a single guardian had the courage to wage a battle against an intractable enemy, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for the BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS and dignity of the mentally retarded and adequate MONEY to ensure those rights. As we all know that battle was won and it paved the way to reform and ensuring THE RIGHT OF CHOICE to all of our developmentally disabled citizens. That victory spawned a very lucrative industry of privately-provided care, inspired the growth of various advocacy groups that now had that one essential tool--political influence, and resulted in the creation of countless jobs as a new era of professionalism was established. This single guardian recently passed away and at some level we are glad he is not here to see us fighting the same basic battle that was won long ago.

Somewhere along the line the basic human right --CHOICE-- and what it took to achieve this right has been forgotten. A more accurate assessment is that it has been upstaged by MONEY and GREED.

The industry it created is so obsessed with JOCKEYING FOR FUNDING and the ever present GREED inherent with improving any businesses bottom line that it has forgotten the reason they even exist--CHOICE. If there were no choices they would be out of business.

The various advocacy groups have become so intertwined with private providers and the government its is almost impossible to determine where one begins and the other ends. Like the private providers, these groups are NOW DRIVEN BY GREED and so fixated on extracting MONEY from the public trough, they have completely lost sight of their mission. Even though it should be obvious, I will state it ... to advocate for CHOICE for ALL the mentally retarded.... not just the ones that fit their so called "new and improved vision." They have misused their political influence and the trust of the people they are suppose to serve to put forth their or rather the "administration's new and improved vision". They fully support the administration's complete disregard for the RIGHTS of people that empowered them with that influence. They have distance themselves so far from their original charter that they have become an adversary of the people they were created to advocate for. They have waged a successful campaign of misinformation and pitted the disabled against each other in their QUEST FOR MONEY. The many families who now HAVE CHOICES have forsaken those that fought the battle for what they now enjoy.

The new era of professionalism and expertise that took years to create is gradually be dismantled, piece-by-piece, in plain sight for all to see but is overlooked. Much like a slight-of-hand card trick. Shuffle the cards, keep talking, and keep the masses focused on what the right hand is doing so they don't notice what the left hand is doing. This card trick is handily being accomplished by the Johnny-come-lately magicians--sorry "professionals" in the hierarchy that have jobs only because WE HAVE OR USED TO HAVE CHOICES.

The administration. It too has a CHOICE. To do the right thing. Ensuring that those who can not care for themselves can exercise their right to CHOOSE the best setting for that care. It should consider all the alternatives available and work for compromise to ensure THEIR BASIC HUMAN RIGHT OF CHOICE remains in tact. Seems simple enough. OR make the GREED driven decision to close these facilities, regardless of the human and monetary costs, to achieve their objective of reaping the windfall from the sale of the land these development centers occupy. After all is said and done, the MONEY is their TRUE OBJECTIVE. AT LEAST THE ADMINISTRATION STILL HAS A CHOICE.

In reality, the administration has given us a CHOICE. Move our profoundly mentally retarded brother in the completely inappropriate setting of the community. A move that would destroy his quality of life. A LIFE, NOT JUST AN EXISTENCE, that has taken most of his 40 years at Fernald to achieve. A move that would, without a doubt, put him back to his misery filled existence of 40 years ago. OR move our brother to the soon-to-be overcrowded Wrentham Development Center now (with the empty promise it will remain open-remember the original promise was only one center would close) OR WHO KNOWS WHERE HE WILL END UP. SOUNDS MORE LIKE A THREAT THAN A CHOICE. In the end the result would be the same. The only CHOICE we now have is to fight for his life and the lives of all of the disabled that have found a LIFE-NOT JUST AN EXISTENCE- in our development centers.

PLEASE - don't let this administration deprive these people of the most basic of all human rights--the right to a life and the right to stay in the only place where a happy life is possible. Please keep our development centers open. It is the ONLY CHOICE a decent human being can make.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan E. Surette

Patricia Beaulieu