

## THE MASSACHUSETTS COALITION OF FAMILIES AND ADVOCATES



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### COFAR Coalition Statehouse Rally Gathers Opposition to Governor Patrick's Facility Closure Plan

It could be another legislative problem for embattled Governor Deval Patrick. Two hundred family members, union nurses and direct care workers, and their supporters rocked the Statehouse Nurses Hall with bursts of applause as they heard four legislators, a former facility director, and COFAR activists reject Governor Patrick's four-year "Community First" plan to close four of the six developmental centers for people with Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disability.

Rep. Karyn Polito (R-Shrewsbury-Westborough), who has written budget language [attached] that would delay the closings pending a feasibility study, ripped the human and fiscal costs: "'Community First' doesn't represent the choice that we believe in for our loved ones. Second of all, this plan is being implemented during an economic downturn. It's a new program. It's going to cost *money* to implement. They just recently sent out an RFP looking for new homes in the community for your loved ones to transition to. This costs money! Someone has estimated about \$45 million over the next four years. At the budget hearings, Commissioner Howe said that the savings are 'uncertain, a moving target' because they're not sure how many of your loved ones will choose the community setting. So unknown savings, but more spending – this is not the recipe we need at this time during the economic downturn."

Rep. Polito added, "I can speak only personally about the Glavin Regional Center. . I am a townie. I grew up in Shrewsbury. I grew up with the Glavin Regional Center in my back yard. When I would go to soccer, I would look up at the window and see the people, looking down on us on the field playing. They would come down and stay with us on the sidelines, and visit with their families. This is community. This is a neighborhood. I go to St. Anne's church and I have residents from the Glavin with me every Sunday, on offering peace at Mass. These are people that volunteer in our community. This is 'Community First.' It already exists. Polito was preceded at the podium by Rep. Angelo Scaccia (D. Hyde Park-Milton), and followed by Senator Michael O. Moore (D. Second Worcester) whose district also includes the Irving R. Glavin Regional Center, and by Rep. Todd Smola (R. Palmer) whose district includes the Monson Developmental Center.

Departing from prepared remarks (attached), former Glavin director Dr. Alfred Bacotti expressed concern about the loss of the facilities as a safety net for the community system, "Today your battle is about whether the families and individuals retain the right to remain in the homes that were theirs when the battles were won in the 1970s. The Department and myself, as recently as six months ago, made promises to people coming out of Fernald Center that they could live in state-operated homes on the grounds of the Glavin regional center, and the Glavin Regional Center would be there to support them, as an ICF. The people made that choice from Fernald in good faith; I believe they made a great choice. And now they are going to take that away some few months later, and I in all good conscience tell you: That is not right. That is a promise broken. Help me out, and make this promise great."

Dr. Bacotti also disputed the claims of cost savings, but also their importance, "On the question of savings, I was talking to a budget aide to [leading Senator], I heard that it has been revised down to a 'budget neutral' No savings, probably a euphemism for 'likely to cost money.' The numbers are not important. Because it should not be about saving a few dollars. It should not be about saving \$41 million dollars. Stay focused. Yo are families with individuals that need you to advocate, and without you that advocacy just disappears, and so they will be moved by some bureaucracy without your input or theirs. You must advocate. It is not a choice; that is a moral obligation."

Templeton parent Bonnie Valade (statement attached) kept the focus on Governor Patrick, "I know times are tough and the Governor has a job to do, but, not off the backs of people with this terrible disability that cannot even stand up for their rights. If he does find it necessary, then shame on him and all that agree with him. He needs to understand he is not just moving people; it's what he is doing to the people that are being moved."

COFAR President David J. Hart presided, pointing to two budget cuts under \$200,000 each that affected hundreds or thousands of disabled people, one to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission, the other to the Tufts Dental Facilities program. Hart showed pictures of a Jamaica Plain mansion recently purchased for \$900,000 by a non-profit provider as a likely example of a "bailout" and "sweetheart deal" for providers in the new state spending to open group home capacity for people to be transferred out of Fernald and the other three developmental centers slated for closure. "If governor Patrick steered favorable financing and a guaranteed state lease to a private for-profit company with \$395,587 per year CEO -- the newspapers and TV stations would be all over it. He might be impeached. Instead, the same basic insider deal minus the campaign contributions is presented to us as 'an investment.'"