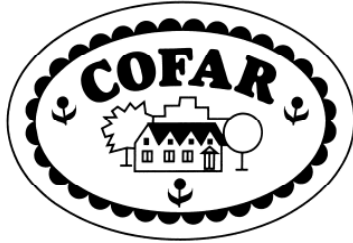


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Gov. Patrick's Plan to Close Four Developmental Centers Broadens State Attack on the Most Disabled

Reviving the broadside tactics of the Romney administration, Governor Deval Patrick today announced a four-year plan to close four of the six developmental centers serving the most vulnerable citizens served by the Commonwealth. A fifth facility, the Hogan regional center, is to be evaluated at the end of four years.

This follows cutbacks and layoffs required by the FY09 state budget, the governor's veto of funds in the facilities line item in that budget, and an additional cutback announced Oct. 15.

"This is an unacceptable attack on the minority of people with MR/DD who are the most disabled, medically fragile, and behaviorally complicated – the most in need of state supports," said COFAR Executive Director Colleen M. Lutkevich. "It violates the spirit of the 1993 court settlement, the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision, and HHS Secretary Bigby's personal promise a year ago to Fernald families that their loved ones could move to another facility, and if they did so would not be forced to move again. By guaranteeing the future of only one facility, in the Southeast corner of the state, Governor Patrick has denied many families any meaningful choice. A safe placement too far to visit, versus a riskier one closer to home is not a full set of options" said Lutkevich.

COFAR President David J. Hart added, "Federal law regulates the six developmental centers as Intermediate Care Facilities/Mental Retardation. By DMR decision, no group homes are allowed to apply to meet this standard, which includes 24-hour nursing care and concentrated programs of active and secure treatment. ICF/MR placement is legal option under Medicaid, and most of the residents of the four centers have rights to stay in an ICF or "equal or better" under the 1993 disengagement agreement. Thousands of others now in the community resident system have a right to return, which some aging people will want to use. I have to come back to the issue of family choice. Moving a loved one into the community system might be a death sentence; but moving them far from family who can now often visit them at Fernald, Monson, Templeton, or Glavin (Shrewsbury) might be another kind of death sentence. And Hogan families have four years of sitting on pins and needles. It just isn't fair," concluded Hart.

COFAR Vice President Thomas J. Frain pointed out, "The federal court monitor looked at case files two years ago, and found a 30% greater chance of abuse and neglect in the community residential system. This is even more of a risk with the highly disabled residents who remain in developmental centers now. Advocates for one-size-fits-all promise to do better, but haven't facility residents endured enough in the bad old days without being forced into risky experiments in privatization now?" asked Frain.

The network of developmental centers is a crucial part of the safety net of the entire community residential system. Many respite, therapy, dentistry, and medical services at the

COFAR is a 25-year-old statewide coalition of parent/family groups and individuals caring for people with Mental Retardation/Developmental Disability. We are advocates for a full continuum of care and for family choice. COFAR is the Massachusetts affiliate of the national Voice of the Retarded, www.vor.net.

developmental centers serve thousands of non-residents as well. The playing fields, auditoriums, meeting spaces, and theatres serve everyone in the region. When Governor Romney announced the closing of the Fernald Center, Waltham representatives, the mayor, and residents formed a coalition to defend their interests.

COFAR Executive Director Colleen Lutkevich reserved full response until the COFAR board can meet and consider options. She said, “ICF residents and potential residents are a minority of people DMR serves, but there are thousands, and their families are deeply committed to them. How the state treats the most vulnerable is a signal to everyone else about what kind of civilization we have. Facility residents have legal rights won in the Ricci vs. Okin suit. The legislature is charged with examining the real costs of this dangerous policy – not just the phony numbers DMR and other advocates put forward, or the claims of the private provider agencies. And the regions now served will be heard from. All our lives we have fought to keep our loved ones from being viewed as mere numbers or game pieces on a board, and we will keep fighting that fight,” said Lutkevich.

COFAR leaders expressed hope that DMR will include facility families in any discussions, committees, and forums that occur. If the Patrick Administration wants to have the open and honest process it claims it does, the statewide group expects improved communication at all levels with family members.

COFAR is a 25-year-old statewide coalition of parent/family groups and individuals caring for people with Mental Retardation/Developmental Disability. We are advocates for a full continuum of care and for family choice. COFAR currently includes five affiliated organizations: The Advocacy Network; Concerned Citizens for the Mentally Retarded, Inc.; The Fernald League for the Retarded, Inc.; The Glavin Association for the Retarded; and The Wrentham Association for the Retarded, Inc. COFAR is the Massachusetts affiliate of the national Voice of the Retarded, www.vor.net.