



Allegheny County Chapter

OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CHILDREN, INC.

917-1001 BRIGHTON ROAD • PITTSBURGH, PA. 15233 • (412) 322-6008

President

Dr. Norman Mulgrave

Acting Executive Director

Ronald E. Archer

January 10, 1974

The Honorable Helene Wohlgemuth, Secretary
Department of Public Welfare
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
P. O. Box 2675
Harrisburg, Pa. 17120

Dear Helene,

On April 17, 1973, you condemned the use of cages. "It is indefensible in this day and age that human beings should be subjected to such degradation and dehumanization."

On December 11, 1973, our Residential Care Committee visited Polk's Gardenside Building. Young women were tied to their benches. The cages as physical structures are gone, but humans are still shackled like animals. In case of fire, the women would have to be cut loose by a knife or perish.

Are bench ties defensible? Is this humane treatment? Were bench ties recommended by your nationally collected team of experts and Pennsylvania superintendents? Where are the alternative treatments that you promised for these caged women?

Your response to deplorable conditions and inadequate care was: "The only immediate answer is to provide a change in leadership, to assure that the treatment and programs at Polk are quickly corrected."

Our response is that a change in leadership was not enough. Offensive body odors, paupers' rags as dresses, urine soaked pants, rows of unprivate toilets, beds crammed close, many women without socks, identical haircuts, little individual attention, factory style feeding, and no activity besides rocking and sitting still exist.

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On Sunday, July 22, 1973, Governor Milton Shapp commented on improvements at Polk as reported by you... "Changes within the last three months have given residents at Polk a new lease on life. In their place (bars on windows and wooden cages) we now have dignity and the start of a more humane and socially responsible approach to the education and care of the mentally retarded... The change in just three short months is electrifying.

Somebody misinformed Governor Shapp. His description of changes does not apply to the Gardenside Building. I doubt that the Governor's words describe any living unit at Polk besides Cottage 1.

The conditions at Polk are disgraceful. The failure to achieve major reforms is shameful.

The absence of care and training is unfair to every women of Gardenside. They are treated as savages, not human beings.

It is immoral that since April 17th the Governor and you have not helped the Gardenside citizens by improving their care or training.

Helene, what are you and the Governor going to do?

Sincerely,

Ginny Thornburgh

Mrs. Virginia J. Thornburgh
Chairperson, Residential
Care Committee

VJT:ps