

news

from



Allegheny County Chapter

of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, Inc.
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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Commonwealth's Department of Public Welfare today was simultaneously praised and condemned by the Allegheny County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children. ACC's statement came in response to reports that DPW intended to use hospitals for the mentally ill to house mentally retarded in emergency situations.

Norman Mulgrave, President of the local organization, said, "We must in fairness commend DPW for recognizing that conditions in many private interim care facilities are even below the minimum standards existing in state institutions such as Polk and Western State School and Hospital. We must commend them for trying to alleviate these conditions in the private facilities. A major objective of this organization has been to have the Department come to just such a recognition."

"HOWEVER, ACC WILL ONLY ACCEPT THIS PLACEMENT OF MENTALLY RETARDED CITIZENS IN MENTAL HOSPITALS IF THEY ARE SEPARATED FROM THOSE WHO ARE MENTALLY ILL AND IF STAFF, TRAINED IN THE CARE AND EDUCATION OF MENTALLY RETARDED PERSONS, IS IMMEDIATELY ACQUIRED."

ACC was generally credited following the alleged murder of Louis Novak, retarded youth of Sharpsburg, at Ridgeview Center in August for taking the lead in calling for improvement in state schools and hospitals and interim care facilities. Last month, the local group was instrumental in forcing the closing of Mountaintop interim care facility in Luzerne County.

Mulgrave added, "The fairest thing we can say about the Department's solution to the problem of interim care, placing the mentally retarded in state mental hospitals, is that it is totally inadequate. In doing this, they are

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talking about beds, not about programs or people."

Mrs. Virginia Thornburgh, Chairman of the local group's investigating team, hit even harder at DPW. She said, "We have been told that the placing of mentally retarded at state mental hospitals is only a temporary interim solution to a crisis. Over a decade ago, interim care facilities were opened as a temporary solution. They're still open and many are still substandard."

There are fifty-seven interim care facilities in the state. The facilities are used to house mentally retarded until an opening occurs at a state school and hospital. There are both private non-profit and profit-making. Recently, in public testimony, the local ARC alleged that some of the profit-making facilities make a net of about \$2,000 annually for each resident. The rate for a resident ranges from \$11 to \$15 a day.

Mrs. Barbara Sistik, also a member of the local group's and DPW's inspection team, said, "If, as we have been told, only life-threatening conditions warrant the closing of an interim care facility and if, even when that happens, the Department's best response is to mix mentally retarded children with the mentally ill, without trained staff or programs, is to totally admit the bankruptcy of our system of care for the mentally disabled."

Historically, associations for retarded children have gone to great lengths to differentiate between mentally retarded and mentally ill. Governor Milton Shapp obviously recognized this distinction in October when he established a special Office of Mental Retardation, with its own Deputy Secretary, with the Department of Welfare.

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