



ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER
Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens, Inc.

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JOAN W. MURDOCH
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Executive Director

March 29, 1978

The Honorable Richard J. Cessar
House of Representatives
Harrisburg, Pa. 17120

Dear Representative Cessar:

Mrs. Stella W. Kandzer, 151 Elmwood Drive, Glenshaw, Pa. 15116, requested that we inform you of the lack of services for citizens who are both mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed or exhibiting behavior problems.

The problem is serious. Because there are few services, individuals tragically regress rather than progress. Families experience intense stress. In some cases, families or other individuals suffer bodily injury.

The "System's" response to these needs disappoints us. Mental health programs reject the clients because they are mentally retarded. Mental retardation programs reject the clients because they are mentally ill.

Some Allegheny County residents are sent to programs far out of the county or out of the state. Some individuals are dumped, without regard for their needs, into state institutions. Outrageous levels of medication are used to "quiet" the residents in place of training.

From our view, state, region, and county officials have failed to develop these needed services during the last five years. Some of the reasons why for their failure include: the risk of dealing with persons with severe emotional problems, the lack of expertise of mental retardation program staff, and prejudice against serving mentally retarded individuals by psychiatrists and other professionals who are experts with emotional problems.



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I think the families we represent would like to see:

1) a community MH/MR system which provides specialized services to help families reduce aggressive or abnormal behavior of their children and reduce the resulting stress on the family.

2) the development of community residential programs for adolescents and adults in the cases where the family can no longer successfully fulfill this responsibility because of extreme behavior.

3) the conversion of some units in the state centers and hospitals to specialize in the care of people with behavior problems, who currently reside in the institutions.

4) total enforcement of each person's state and federal right to treatment in the least restrictive alternative and due process prior to such arrangements.

If you share these goals and are as concerned as members of our chapter, you might wish to meet with us or others to learn more about the problem and eventually stimulate the Office of Mental Retardation and the Office of Mental Health of the Department of Public Welfare to aggressively develop quality services.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Robert Nelkin
Associate Executive Director

RN:cp

CC: Charles A. Peters, Administrator, MH/MR
Marlene Burda, Chairperson, ACC-PARC Legislative
Committee
Mrs. Stella W. Kandzer