

DRAFT

From the outset, Allegheny County Chapter, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, would like to applaud KDKA for its long history of editorial support of the mental retardation movement. Unfortunately, the editorial of \_\_\_\_\_ requires reply.

We agree with KDKA that the real issues in the current mental retardation controversies may have become obscured. The KDKA editorial did nothing to alleviate that obscurity. The station used such phrases as, "... over-involved," to describe the climate of the mental retardation movement. Our feeling is that if the citizens of Pennsylvania were, in fact, involved emotionally, the Commonwealth would not be faced with the present crisis in services for the mentally retarded.

For example, the legislature has already cut \$13,700,000 out of the retardation budget for 1973-74. A nearly equal sum was allowed to die in the House Appropriations Committee in the current fiscal year. There was no mass emotional outcry from the mental retardation movement and certainly none from an aroused citizenry. And yet, people should be involved emotionally and react emotionally to statistics like Pennsylvania's rank in service to the retarded.

Pennsylvania

Rank for maintenance expenditure	9--creditable, but not outstanding
Rank for number of full-time personnel	20--this is why we have cages
Rank for least number of deaths	39--no comment is needed
Rank for total admissions	35--because in communities, programs are inadequate
Rank for net releases alive from institutions	38--no comment is needed

The issue that has been obscured, and the statistics revealed, is that Pennsylvania does not adequately care for her mentally retarded citizens.

KDKA then said it is "almost impossible to provide adequate care and supervision for some of the more severely retarded patients." Difficult? Depending on how you measure, that may be so. Impossible? Other states do it.) In the litany of unsatisfactory alternatives to the Polk cages--such as straps, chains, straight jackets, excessive tranquilizers--little mention



has been made of the most obvious alternative; adequate staff.

This was not mentioned because it is the most expensive--and most humane and effective alternative. The issue that has been obscured is the existing philosophy of providing not what is best but what is cheapest!! More staff would cost money and <sup>but the</sup> legislature has chosen to ignore the needs of retarded citizens. Pennsylvania ranks twentieth in the nation in number of full-time staff.

The station then said, "The various and sundry investigations which have been carried on may not always have been conducted on a truly professional basis...we question whether the people in charge of programs are necessarily the best equipped to investigate themselves." ACC could not agree more.

However, the station overlooked the efforts of professionals from the Allegheny County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program and the Auditor General's office. The station might also have noted that teams of experts, from outside Pennsylvania, have been spending extensive time at Polk State School and Hospital. Polk, incidentally, is the current, but certainly not the only, facility worthy of investigation.

KDKA might have noted that Allegheny County Chapter consumer investigation and evaluation effort was recognized by the state-wide "Community Services of Pennsylvania." *DPW has not been permitted to voluntarily investigate itself.*

In conclusion, we, too, feel the issues are obscured. But, one of the primary reasons they are obscured is because KDKA (and other TV and radio stations) have failed to use their own investigative and reporting capacity to adequately inform the public about the issues. If truly concerned, KDKA might do for the mental retardation scandal what the "Washington Post" did for Watergate.