



Association for Retarded Citizens
Pennsylvania

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JOHN O. BOYLE
President

W.A. WEST
Executive Director

May 25, 1983

Dottie Rowe
Office of Mental Retardation
Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
Health & Welfare Building
Harrisburg, Pa. 17120

Dear Dottie:

The ARC, Pennsylvania is continually confronted with abuse and neglect at the state's mental retardation units and centers. I know from visiting the institutions that it is almost impossible to eradicate, but the ARC does believe that steps could be taken to prevent the incidence of abuse.

First and foremost, hiring practices must be improved. The Pennhurst aide who was charged with assault last fall was still serving a probationary period for a previous assault conviction. While the ARC believes everyone is entitled to a second chance, it should not be at the expense of mentally retarded people. There are too many positions at institutions which do not require direct contact with the residents.

We also know from numerous conversations with other staff at Ebensburg that a few of the suspects in the rape case had questionable backgrounds. An outsider involved in the case was shocked by some of the persons hired to care for clients.

The state of our economy has produced an employer's market. There are thousands of good people who desperately need jobs. And let's face it, most of our institutions are located in rural areas where employment opportunities are few. The state center positions are valued since they pay decent salaries and have tremendous benefits packages. There's no excuse for hiring anyone who is not well qualified.

In a February 10 letter to Jennifer Howse, I demanded that mentally retarded people be afforded the same protection prisoners receive.

My request was based on a gubernatorial ruling in January that mandated psychological testing and a screening process for corrections officer positions. (Enclosed is a copy of the release announcing this Civil Service approved procedure.)

I received no written response from Dr. Howse on this issue, but was told in a telephone conversation with her the week of March 28, that the Civil Service Commission was looking into the employment guidelines for hiring direct care staff and the Commission's decision was imminent. I still have not had a definitive response on the hiring practices issue.

The ARC has been demanding improvements in employment practices at Pennsylvania's state centers since 1976, but we have made no headway. We believe that the Department should be embarrassed and angered by these constant reports of abuse; enough so to take some precautionary steps to stop it. The first step should be hiring the most capable, compassionate and patient people to deal with our institutionalized retarded citizens.

The ARC again urges the Department to improve hiring practices by following the same employment guidelines now being used in prisons to protect mentally retarded people in Pennsylvania institutions.

Thank you. May I hear from you soon.

Sincerely,



Teddi Leiden, Chairperson
Residential Services Committee

/jb
Enc.

cc: Howse
Cohen
Thornburgh
Boyle
Kelly
West