

# news

from

MARY LOU MAGISTRI, P. R. DIRECTOR  
Phone: 322-6008



Allegeny County Chapter  
of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, Inc.  
917 Brighton Road Pittsburgh, Pa. 15233

August 28, 1972

## NEWS CONFERENCE

### ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER of the Pennsylvania Association For Retarded Children

PURPOSE: To unravel story of State government's incompetance leading to the death of Louis Novak, Allegheny County mentally retarded youth.

#### ATTENDING:

Norman W. Mulgrave, President, ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER, PARC.

Mrs. Barbara Sistik, Representative from ACC-PARC's Board of Directors to Ridge View Investigating team.

Mrs. J. J. Isherwood, PARC Residential Services Chairman during the Hillcrest and Ridge View investigations.

Robert F. Jennings, Wayne County Coroner

Robert Nelkin, Director of ACC's Community & Chapter Affairs Div.; Staff Liaison to Ridge View investigating team.

Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Novak, Parents of Louis Novak, the most recent victim at Ridge View.

William B. Dixon, Esq., Legal council for the Novak family.

Michael R. Kelly, Esq., Legal council for the Novak family.

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press conference, 9:30 a.m., 8/28/72

STATEMENT OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER  
NORMAN W. MULGRAVE, PRESIDENT

In response to the August 20th death of Louis Novak, a fifteen-year-old Allegheny County youth at Ridge View Center, the ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (ACC-PARC) immediately dispatched an investigating team to the institution. This was the third ACC-PARC visitation to Ridge View in the past two months. The previous visits were motivated by the death of one of the residents of this center in a garbage compacting truck; as well as the Allegheny County Chapter's long standing concern that state government has abdicated its responsibility to monitor and correct inhumane conditions existing in interim care institutions. The above, coupled with the Department of Welfare's lack of commitment to the provision of quality services to the mentally retarded citizens of the Commonwealth, causes us to make public the results of the investigating team's effort.

The Allegheny County Chapter has been working since 1970 to effect the closing of Ridge View, formerly called Hillcrest; to obtain the removal of all Allegheny County residents from this institution; and to halt further placement of Allegheny County residents in this institution. It is now hoped that an enraged citizenry can accomplish what we have been unable to accomplish through regular channels.

- more -

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Add 2

In the 16 month period that Ridge View operated this school, the State cited Violations of regulations and threatened legal action to revoke Ridge View's license at least six times. No action was taken until last week...and then only after protests from citizen's groups regarding the alledged forced drowning of an adolescent resident.

Reports from the DPW staff and Elliot Knauer's personal visits to Ridge View tell of dangerous physical conditions, inadequate staff and supervision, filthy sanitary conditions, and depersonalized living conditions. There were at least one dozen staff reports on inadequate conditions - received by Knauer.

On our most recent visit, we received reports alledging excessive physical punishment, the use of tranquilizers as a means of punishment, residents being asked to enforce punishment against other residents or perform staff duties, such as bathing another resident, and other improperly reported deaths.

Some of the violations cited in the first DPW report in September, 1971 remained violations when ACC-PARC sent an inspection team in June and August, 1972.

The recommendations of the investigating team and the Allegheny County Chapter are:

(1) THAT THE 325 ALLEGHENY COUNTY MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN AND ADULTS PRESENTLY CONFINED IN INTERIM CARE FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE SHOULD NOT BE INSTITUTIONALIZED OUTSIDE OF THE WESTERN PRNNSYLVANIA AREA AND SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY RETURNED TO THIS REGION.

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The institutional placement of the mentally retarded must be close enough that parents, friends and relatives may frequently visit--and close enough that Mental Health/Mental Retardation officials can fulfill their responsibility to monitor these services.

(2) THAT HELENE WOHLGEMUTH, SECRETARY OF PUBLIC WELFARE, IMMEDIATELY INVESTIGATE ALL INTERIM CARE FACILITIES: THEIR PROGRAMS, EMPLOYEES, PLACEMENT PROCEDURES, LIVING CONDITIONS, AND THE REGULATIONS FOR LICENSURE.

FURTHER, THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE DISCONTINUE AND PROHIBIT CONTRACTING OF MENTAL RETARDATION SERVICES TO PRIVATE, PROFIT MAKING CONCERNs.

The Allegheny County Chapter has guaranteed the Secretary that the Chapter will be unyielding on conditions that need correction. We promise to continue our investigations throughout the State, wherever an Allegheny County resident is warehoused, and, as advocates for the retarded, we will not relent until the safety of all is guaranteed.

(3) THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE RESCIND THE CONTRACTS FOR THE SEVEN PROPOSED COMMUNITY RESIDENCES THEY HAVE BEEN NEGOTIATING WITH COMMONWEALTH CONCERNs, INC.

FURTHERMORE, THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE CEASE NEGOTIATING ANY ADDITIONAL CONTRACTS WITH COMMONWEALTH CONCERNs, INC.

This is demanded in light of the conditions at Ridge View which is operated by this combine, Commonwealth Concerns, Inc.

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(4) THAT, BECAUSE OF HIS FAILURE TO ACT AS AN ADVOCATE FOR THE CHILDREN AT RIDGE VIEW; BECAUSE HE WAS AWARE OF RIDGE VIEW CONDITIONS THROUGH STAFF REPORTS AND HIS OWN PERSONAL VISITS; AND BECAUSE HE FAILED TO ENFORCE HIS MANY COMPLIANCE ORDERS TO RIDGE VIEW, WE QUESTION THE RIGHT OF THE REGIONAL SECRETARY OF PUBLIC WELFARE, ELLIOTT R. KNAUER, TO CONTINUE IN THAT POST.

THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER THEREFORE CALLS FOR THE RESIGNATION OF ELLIOTT R. KNAUER.

(5) THAT GOVERNOR MILTON SHAPP IMMEDIATELY INSTRUCT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL INVESTIGATION INTO ALL OF THE REPORTED AND ALLEGED INCIDENTS THAT HAVE OCCURRED AT RIDGE VIEW, FORMERLY HILLCREST.

The Allegheny County Chapter is calling for this special investigation because of the long history of deaths, reported brutalities, inhumane living conditions, and excessive number of run-away residents.

Over the years, Wayne County Coroner, Robert Jennings, has investigated and attempted to publicize and bring to justice those individuals responsible for the heinous conditions at Ridge View Center and Hillcrest. State government must now assume the responsibility since Coroner Jennings, a local official, has been frustrated in his every effort.

Both Coroner Robert Jennings and the attorneys for the family of Louis Novak concur with this demand.

- more -

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(6) THAT A SPECIAL GRAND JURY BE CONVENED TO DETERMINE WHAT CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS SHOULD BE INSTITUTED.

(7) THAT THE MISSING ALLEGHENY COUNTY RESIDENT OF WHITE DEER, ANOTHER INTERIM CARE FACILITY IN HAWLEY, PENNSYLVANIA, BE FOUND IMMEDIATELY. FURTHER, THAT A COMPLETE REPORT OF THIS INCIDENT BE MADE PUBLIC.

This youth has been missing long enough for the state to be concerned about the continuance of their reimbursement to White Deer for his care. The Allegheny County Chapter, conversely, is intensely interested in his well-being.

THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHAPTER REQUESTS THAT ALL CITIZENS WRITE TO THE GOVERNOR AND THEIR LEGISLATORS DEMANDING THAT:

- a special investigation by the Justice Department into the deaths, brutalities, living conditions and runaways at Ridge View.
- the Department of Public Welfare stop contracting with Commonwealth Concerns, Inc.
- the Department of Public Welfare conduct an immediate and ongoing investigation of all interim care facilities for the mentally retarded.
- a resignation be obtained from Deputy Secretary of Public Welfare, Elliott R. Knauer, and others responsible for allowing the continuance of inhumane conditions at Ridge View.

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Add 6

-- the State government demonstrate its commitment to services to mentally retarded children and adults by restoring the \$10.962 million dollars removed from services to the mentally retarded due to the \$12 million cut in the appropriation to the Department of Welfare.