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APR 27 1973

DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE

Ref. to _____

R. D. #1

Hadley, Pennsylvania 16130

April 24, 1973

Mrs. Wohlgemuth
Secretary of the Department of
Public Welfare
Public Welfare Office
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17101

Dear Mrs. Wohlgemuth:

The cruel, degrading and inhumane conditions observed at Polk, referring specifically to locked cages and pens authorized for the confinement of patients, and severe and chronic deficiencies with respect to the proper training and orientation of professional and nonprofessional staff in the appropriate care and treatment of mentally retarded residents — are these grounds for dismissal of our Superintendent Dr. James McClelland, Jr. ? To whom are they cruel, degrading and inhumane? To you they may seem to be after a cursory two hour examination. What are the employees taught?

I contend that these charges are incorrect according to Webster's New World Dictionary, College Edition, 1966, definition of cruel, degrading, inhumane, severe, and chronic.

The pens, cages, or however you refer to them are not cruel because they aren't used for or are they disposing to inflict pain and suffering; they aren't used with delight in the patients' sufferings; nor are they used without mercy or pity. They aren't causing or of a kind to cause pain, or distress; they aren't used with indifference to the sufferings of others or to inflict sufferings on residents. They are used to prevent, alleviate, and minimize the suffering of all the residents!

They aren't degrading because they aren't used to lower the rank or stature of, or to corrupt the quality or moral character of the resident. Neither are they used to bring dishonor or contempt to the resident.

They aren't inhumane because they are used in a manner that shows feelings that are moved by the sufferings of others.

What should replace them?

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As for the charge that the training of employees in the proper treatment of mentally retarded has severe and chronic deficiencies, we need to know what is taught and then what needs to be added. Did you review the training programs?

In respect to this charge, I also add what Dr. Richard Myers, director of the Graduate Program in Mental Retardation section of the Special Education Department at Slippery Rock State College, said in December 1972 in answer to my question of what would be taught and who would teach courses about education of the profoundly retarded. He stated that the colleges would have to go to the State institutions and to people who worked with severely and profoundly retarded as the college educators have mostly been working with educables and have only recently started specializing in trainables. Doesn't it seem strange to you that educators would be coming to Polk to learn from the employees what to teach teachers of the profoundly retarded if we are so deficient in our knowledge of the retarded child?

As a special education teacher who has taught trainables for one semester and educables for one year outside the institution, and profoundly retarded in the Intensive Training Unit at Polk for fourteen months, and severely retarded above the school age for eight months, I feel I have some idea, although limited, of how to treat the residents. The institution needs many things, but we want to grow in our educational approach to the retarded, not be prosecuted for conditions caused by insufficient staff and facilities that the bureaucratic red tape causes. I do not feel that the institution or the residents' needs are being best served by the dismissal of a person who has the experience, knowledge, and years of honorable service as Dr. McClelland has.

In summation, I feel that the dismissal of Dr. James McClelland, Jr. as Superintendent at Polk State School and Hospital for the reasons given, is in error and I urge you to reconsider the action.

Respectfully yours,

George F. Moyer

George F. Moyer
Special Education Teacher I