



Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens

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MRS. TEDDI LEIDEN
President

THEODORE E. JOHNSON, Ed. D.
Executive Director
PUBLIC WELFARE

January 8, 1979

The Honorable Aldo Colautti
Secretary of Public Welfare
333 Health & Welfare Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Secretary Colautti:

We greatly appreciated having the opportunity to visit with you on January 4 to discuss our grave concerns about the lack of appropriate dental care for the residents at Ebensburg and Cresson Centers.

As we noted, PARC's Residential Services Committee has recorded in our visitation reports for at least the past three years, the poor dental health among the residents at Ebensburg. In February 1977, Cresson's acting superintendent Strolla, wrote to inform DPW regarding the urgent need for improved dental care at Cresson.

We are indeed grateful that your Department, through the Office of Mental Retardation, authorized the in-depth review by Dr. Jay Reznik in July 1978, to ascertain the level of dental care among the residents of Ebensburg. This review, which had been requested by Dr. Hartley, Superintendent at Ebensburg, confirmed our worst suspicions. Though the report to the Committee of Dentists chosen by OMR to verify the results of Reznik's investigation is incomplete, it is our understanding that this survey found conditions to be as bad, if not worse, than had been found by Dr. Reznik.

We certainly understand your reluctance to discuss the nature and extent of the gross dental abuse at Ebensburg since you did not then have the benefit of the Dental Committee's report. Now that the report is in, however, there can be no question that a severe problem, which requires your personal attention, does, in fact, exist at Ebensburg and there is every reason to believe that the ongoing study at Cresson will disclose a similar situation.

We believe that the \$32,000 recently appropriated by your office to purchase dental equipment for Ebensburg and Cresson is a long-range step toward rectifying this serious situation. Further the contract with Dr. Balachak to provide dental care and consultation on a twice-weekly basis at Ebensburg until July is also positive.

As commendable and positive as the above steps are, they are only steps and by themselves can in no way be expected to effectively remedy the years of neglect or provide restorative and preventive dentistry for the residents at these Centers. What must be done is that sufficient funds must be provided for adequate qualified personnel, either on staff or by contract, to remedy the past abuses and provide ongoing quality dental care. These institutions do not have discretionary funds available to remedy this situation without the direct assistance of your Department.

and it is ludicrous to contemplate reductions in staff and programs, which are marginal at best, to provide these funds.

When we visited your Office, we had hoped for a full commitment from your Department to undertake immediate remedial action as well as to provide intermediate and long-range planning to fully correct past and present deficiencies. We were acutely disappointed in your unwillingness to address the problem at that time, but now that all the studies are in, there is no reason why prompt action cannot be taken. It is the responsibility of the Commonwealth, through your Department, to provide humane care. It is therefore your responsibility to immediately address this problem.

We would appreciate your response by January 12 as to what steps will be taken by DPW to bring immediate relief.

Very truly yours,

Elsie Schmidt

Elsie Schmidt, Regional Vice President
National Association for Retarded Citizens
Immediate Past President
Pa. Association for Retarded Citizens

Midge Scannell

Midge Scannell, Chairman
Residential Services Committee, PARC

Gloria Mitchell

Gloria Mitchell, Parent
Resident at Ebensburg Center
Board Member, Westmoreland Co. ARC

Worth Helms

Worth Helms, Board Member
Developmental Disabilities Advocacy Network