

WSSA
File

November 13, 1974

Marjorie Matson
Tom Kerr
Tony Wettick
Civil Libertarian Selection Committee
Greater Pittsburgh ACLU

Dear Marjorie, Tom, and Tony,

I oppose the naming of Governor Milton Shapp as ACLU Civil Libertarian of the year. I recognize how the Governor's vetoes of abortions, pornography, and death penalty legislation could lead you to this selection. You could even add to your list of supporting reasons, Shapp's firing of Polk's Superintendent Dr. James McClland for allowing retarded citizens to be kept in animal cages. However, the Governor's responsibility and authority extends far beyond mere negative activity (i.e., vetoes, firings).

During the Governor's first term, the life conditions and treatment of institutionalized, mentally retarded citizens have not significantly improved. More important, for our purposes, institutionalized retarded citizens suffer from the disregard of their First, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment rights. Some examples from the months of August, September, and October include:

The teenage boy who fled from his unsupervised unit and drowned in the Western State School and Hospital's reservoir.

The severely retarded teenage girl who was critically injured and paralyzed from a beating on an unsupervised unit at Western State School and Hospital.

The young woman who strangled on her restraint dress while tied to a special restraint chair at Polk State School and Hospital.

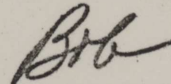
A sampling of other degrading conditions is stated here. 470 individuals are restrained at Polk State School and Hospital. Medical care is often not adequately provided. Individuals do not receive rehabilitation training. Residents sleep in bedrooms with 100 other individuals with no more than an inch or two between beds. Privacy is non-existent.

In view of this dissent, I would like to see:

- (1) The Civil Libertarian Selection Committee revoke the invitation to Governor Shapp stating his failure to protect the civil liberties of institutionalized retarded citizens; or
- (2) The ACLU Board of Directors override the selection of Governor Shapp as the Civil Libertarian of the year stating his failure to protect the civil liberties of institutionalized retarded citizens; or
- (3) The ACLU Board make provisions for a minority report during the ceremony prior to the presentation to the Governor; or
- (4) There be a public protest at the ACLU annual meeting.

I will be out of town and will be unable to attend the ACLU Board Meeting, but I have stated my views in this letter and expect that the Board will make a proper decision.

Sincerely,



Robert Nelkin

RN:cp

P.S. Although this is not an agency position of the Allegheny County Chapter, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens, Ginny Thornburgh, ACC-PARC President, asked that I add her name in the opposition of Governor Shapp's selection for the above stated reasons.