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WELFARE

To the Editor:

I write this letter to protest the firing of Dr. James McClelland, administrator of the Polk State School and Hospital for Mentally Retarded Children.

As a Dietetic Intern in a program operated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I served in a number of State institutions including Polk. More specifically, I worked as a food service supervisor in one of the patient buildings at Polk, and I spent a good portion of my time in the patient wards.

One of the many things I learned from my experience at Polk was that retarded patients occasionally hurt themselves or other children, inadvertently. One way to prevent injury would be to provide constant, personal supervision. A more realistic method of protecting patients, particularly in underfunded, understaffed institutions, is to confine the "aggressors" for short periods.

I did see "king-sized playpens" (which Secretary Wohgelmuth called "cages") in use at Polk. However, the structures were located in the same lounge with the rest of the patients, they were large enough for the patient to move around comfortably, and I never saw the pens used for disciplining patients, only protecting them.

I think Secretary Wohgelmuth acted with unjustifiable haste when she concluded that the Polk patients were being treated inhumanely and that Dr. McClelland condoned cruelty in the institution.

During my five weeks at Polk, I saw so much warmth and constructive work that I cannot believe Dr. McClelland either cruel or incompetent.

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The Centre Daily Times
The Pennsylvania Mirror
The Harrisburg Patriot