



NEWS

from

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A fire Thursday at Cresson State School and Hospital which resulted in the deaths of two residents has triggered increased efforts by the Allegheny County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children to insure that fire and safety regulations, as established by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, are enforced in all residential facilities for the mentally retarded. Alex Streppa, 21, whose family resides at 1011 Chartiers Avenue in Pittsburgh, is still hospitalized from the effects of smoke inhalation.

Mrs. Barbara Sistik, a member of the ACC-PARC Board of Directors, and Robert Nelkin, staff member, inspected Cresson immediately following the fire. According to them, a bill to enable Cresson State School and Hospital to comply with fire and safety regulations died in the House Appropriations Committee last year. House Bill 2637 would have provided such protections as sprinklers and detection equipment. Mrs. Sistik said, "Cresson is not even in compliance with their own fire and safety regulations. We must wonder if these two deaths could have been averted if Cresson had received the \$625,000 requested in the legislation and had installed this equipment."

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Superintendent Will H. Burrow stated that "Labor and Industry made the Department of Public Welfare aware of the deficiencies in the building two or three years ago. The potential is here for something a lot worse."

"It is fortunate," Mrs. Sistik continued, "that the entire wing didn't become an absolute inferno. It is frightening to think of what might have happened with less alert, dedicated, efficient staff members on duty." According to the Fire Marshall, 140 residents were evacuated in four minutes.

Dr. Norman W. Mulgrave, President of the local Chapter, reaffirmed ACC-PARC's position as advocates for mentally retarded in facilities across the State and announced that the agency would launch an intensive effort to have fire and safety compliance records of Pennsylvania's nine State Schools and Hospitals and interim care facilities investigated. Mulgrave asked, "What if this had happened at Polk or any of the huge, old, overcrowded, understaffed facilities? How could a handful of staff evacuate hundreds of non-ambulatory residents from buildings with wall to wall beds and insufficient fire escape routes?"

"We will not wait for another tragedy, another death," asserted Dr. Mulgrave. "We will act now to take whatever action is necessary to guarantee that the State corrects and enforces its own fire and safety regulations."

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