



Allegheny County Chapter

OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CHILDREN, INC.

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President
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Executive Director
C. A. Peters

July 11, 1972

TO: ACC Board of Directors
FROM: C. A. Peters, Executive Director
SUBJ: Residential Care of the Mentally Retarded

INTRODUCTION

A series of events during the last ten days has served to emphasize the failure of this organization to give appropriate attention to the plight of mentally retarded individuals housed in state schools and hospitals and Commonwealth subsidized interim care facilities. A report from Bob Nelkin, Acting Director of Community and Chapter Affairs, concerning two units at Western State School and Hospital is appended. On July 9, Nelkin attended a meeting of the Western State School and Hospital parents' group and staff during which many other equally horrendous incidents were recounted.

On July 6 and 7 the Executive Director, accompanied Mrs. Ginny Thornburgh, First Vice President, ACC, Mrs. J. J. Isherwood, Chairman, PARC Residential Care Committee and Nelkin on visits to two (2) interim care facilities. Conditions in both were deplorable. Mrs. Thornburgh's report has been made available to the board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To evidence commitment and concern, ACC should consider taking immediate and dramatic action at Western State School and Hospital, even if it is only a visit by a delegation of the Board.

ACC should then create a committee to report to the Board by the September Board meeting with a definite plan of action to involve ACC in the improvement of both plant and program at Western State School and Hospital, Polk State School and Hospital and all interim care facilities in which Allegheny County residents are housed.

Such a plan must include a method to focus the state organization's attention on this long neglected area of service to the mentally retarded.

Options to be explored by the committee should include legal action, legislative investigation, media exposes, joint ACC facility/staff committees or a combination of these approaches. In no case should a "long range plan" emerge as the committee's recommendation. Action should be immediate, decisive and have a built-in mechanism to insure that never again does ACC develop the philosophy common to the citizens of Pennsylvania, "out of sight, out of mind." Whatever plan is adopted, it must have a clearly defined beginning and ending date. July 1, 1973 should be the absolute latest date.

1. An educational program for legislators that will result in greater financial commitment by the State to these facilities.
2. Model legislation for decreasing parental financial liability for residential care and terminating it totally (in accordance with prior Board action) at age twenty-one (21).
3. Drafts of appropriate guidelines and/or regulations covering both plant and program standards should be prepared. Provision for closing down offending facilities must be built into the guideline.
4. A proposal, including feasibility study and cost estimates, that will make ACC a developer and manager of interim care programs.* This should include contacts with Governor's Crime Commission concerning the possibility of Law Enforcement Assistance Agency (LEAA) funds for specialized community housing for "defective delinquents."

Before the end of the summer this committee activity should include visits to Western State School and Hospital, Polk State School and Hospital and interim care facilities in and around Allegheny County, such as Allegheny Valley School, McGuire Home, Mitchell Home and others.

CAP:kb

encl.

* This should be done in conjunction with the Long Range Planning Committee and Community Residential Committee.