



PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION for RETARDED CHILDREN, Inc.

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MEMO TO: PARC Chapter Presidents/Executives

DATE: April 23, 1973

FROM: Mrs. Harry P. Clapp
PARC President

RE: Polk State School & Hospital

Reports surrounding Polk State School and Hospital indicate the situation to have been very hectic in the last few days. It is important we report to chapters the positions taken by the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children.

As you know dating back as far as 1967 careful reviews were made of our state schools and hospitals including Polk. At that time, a great deal of concern was expressed about the overcrowding and lack of appropriate programmatic services. You will recall, at our 1969 convention in Pittsburgh, the response of the convention body was to take action for change in the institutions as a result of this study. The Right to Education suit was a result of this focus, with the feeling of our legal counsel that class action in this area would affect the largest number of the mentally retarded.

The Allegheny County Chapter had made several visits to Polk State School and Hospital in 1972 and expressed great concern about overcrowding and lack of programs.

On February 27, 1973, Mrs. Eleanor Elkin, Chairman, PARC Residential Services Committee; Mrs. Isherwood, PARC Secretary and Sub-committee Chairman on Interim Care; Richard Bazelon, Attorney; and our Executive Director and myself visited Polk to better acquaint ourselves with the institution and what services were being provided.

We were disturbed by what we found at that visit. We were disturbed by:

1. The continued overcrowding of wards in which we found 100 beds stacked side by side.
2. Locations where cribs were pushed against each other leaving little access to the severely retarded in these cribs.

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3. Use of restraints, such as straitjackets.
4. Residents, both young and old, tied to benches.
5. The use of enclosures which we could only characterize as cages. These were found in use at several locations.

These conditions, along with our earlier reports, heightened our distress and prompted us to call for further action.

In our discussion with the superintendent his attitude, which I am sure was sincere, was that very little could be done. He seemed quite satisfied that his residents were happy and content. Consequently, we called upon the Secretary of Public Welfare and the Governor's Office requesting that an immediate visit to the institution be made. We asked them to observe the dehumanizing aspects of these cages, to disassemble them and to implement appropriate programs.

The Secretary of Public Welfare visited Polk on April 14 unannounced. Accompanying the Secretary was Deputy Secretary Norman Taylor. The Secretary also invited me to attend.

The Secretary was distressed with the cages found and ordered them immediately dismantled. Subsequently, it was reported to us that the Secretary, in discussion with the Governor, decided to terminate Dr. McClelland as Superintendent. It was reported that she offered Dr. McClelland the opportunity to retire, but he refused. His employment was terminated on April 16.

The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children did not call for the removal or termination of Dr. McClelland, but did call for action to be taken with respect to the conditions we found. After the Secretary's action, PARC supported the Secretary and Governor for taking this courageous step with the indicated intention of following through with programmatic changes at Polk.

It is our understanding that the Secretary's removal of Dr. McClelland from his position was because he did not see a need for any different approach.

The purpose and goal of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children is to see that appropriate programs and services are provided for the mentally retarded. This includes programs within institutions; programs which enable people to move back to the community and programs for mentally retarded persons now in the community. This objective and purpose must be kept in the forefront. We cannot become involved with any efforts to carry out vendettas against individuals or personalities.

I implore all members and chapters to work as advocates for the mentally retarded. Our concern is with the mentally retarded, not politics.