

# Mail Censorship Charged at Polk

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Polk State School and Hospital has been charged with violating federal law by censoring the mail of retarded residents and with prohibiting them from placing or receiving outside phone calls.

The charges were made by the state Welfare Department's Western Region in a memo from Norman J. Taylor, deputy secretary of the Pittsburgh-based Regional Office, to Dr. James H. McClelland, superintendent of Polk in Venango County.

The memo, dated Feb. 9, was obtained by the Post-Gazette yesterday.

**BOTH INCOMING** and outgoing mail is "opened and censored," the memo

says, as a regular policy of the institution.

"These actions are specifically prohibited by . . . the Mental Health Mental Retardation Act of 1966," the memo states.

The memo directs Dr. McClelland to allow patients to use public pay phones, in booths, to make private uncensored phone calls and to read a resident's mail only in cases where the resident is unable to read it himself — and then in the resident's presence.

Dr. McClelland has not replied to the memo. Yesterday, however, he told the Post-Gazette his institution does not censor mail but he admitted opening envelopes addressed to residents because "money is often enclosed in the en-

velopes, along with directions (to the residents) for its use."

He also admitted placing curbs on phone use. He attributed this to an inadequate switchboard system. He said he hopes to install pay phones in the near future.

**WELFARE DEPARTMENT** policy says parents of retarded residents must be informed that money is not to be mailed directly to residents unless the resident has shown an ability to handle money.

**Dr. McClelland said more than \$30,000 a year is received at Polk through residents' presence.**

Walter Bennett, regional Welfare Deputy in charge of mental health and re-

tardation, yesterday said he has checked the six other interim care institutions in the Western Region and found no evidence of censorship or telephone restrictions.

Charles Peters, executive director of the Allegheny chapter, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, declared:

"It's inconceivable to us that people would not be given access to phones. Telephone use should be part of the process of helping a resident normalize."

The issue at Polk was triggered by a complaint from the father of a retarded girl who claimed he was temporarily prevented from placing a call to his daughter to tell her he would be unable to visit her during a special celebration at Polk.

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