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Association for Retarded Citizens, Allegheny County Chapter

June 2, 1983



Mr. Walter Cohen, Secretary
Department of Public Welfare
Health and Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Mr. Cohen:

On June 1, 1983, I spoke with Brian Baxter about extreme concerns following a recent visit to Highland Park Center, an Intermediate Care Facility for mentally retarded people here in Pittsburgh. I enclose a report on that visit and several documents pertinent to our continued findings of client-abusive situations at state-funded facilities for retarded persons.

During our visit to Highland Park Center, on May 27, 1983, we were given an animal prod that was used in aversive "therapy" for several severely handicapped clients of the Center.

In addition, we were told that seventy-one (71) of the one hundred thirty-two (132) clients of the Center are on some type of maladaptive behavior program, including physical restraints and time out. The Highland Park Center Human Rights Committee is an internal staff committee with one parent representative.

ARC considered going public with our strong feelings about this outrageously abusive treatment of clients. We would prefer that DPW immediately investigate these improprieties and correct the deficiencies at Highland Park Center of its own volition.

We request that DPW immediately take the following actions to ensure the safety and well being of clients at Highland Park Center:

1. Form an investigative team to look into admitted practices of aversive behavioral techniques at the Center. We understand that Erik Wittman has been asked to head up such a team.

Member Unit
Association for
Retarded Citizens - U.S.

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Allegheny County
Mental Health
Mental Retardation
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We do not think it appropriate to ask staff of Western Region OMR to participate in this team, since our documents indicate Western Regional OMR staff approval of aversive techniques including the animal prod. The Committee should have free reign to make and follow-up specific recommendations for change at the facility.

2. Release the DPW audit of Highland Park Center that was completed in the summer of 1982. Despite repeated requests, DPW has not released an audit of Highland Park Center, prompted by allegations of improprieties last year.

As you are aware, the situation at Highland Park Center is but an example of serious problems and abusive situations throughout the Commonwealth. We urge you to work with the Department of Health to improve the certification process so that retardation facilities will not violate the legal and human rights of clients.

In view of the Department's tacit approval of the electric shock procedure, we expect your response and corrective action to begin immediately.

Sincerely,

N. Karen Kelly
N. Karen Kelly

NKK:bjm

cc: Brian Baxter
Jennifer Howse