

R. D. 2
Dillsburg, PA 17019

April 25, 1973

Received in
SECRETARY'S OFFICE

APR 27 1973

DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE

The Honorable Helene Wohlgemuth
Secretary of Public Welfare
333 Health & Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Wohlgemuth:

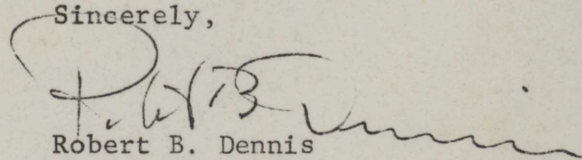
The Harrisburg Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union has often been critical of the Department of Public Welfare on matters of the rights of patients within mental institutions and we have not hesitated to criticize the absence of action we considered necessary. Often, I fear, we have failed to commend officials who have taken action to insure the constitutional rights and the human dignity of patients.

Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to commend you for ordering the dismantling of dehumanizing cages which have been used routinely in controlling the mentally retarded.

News reports that the Department--whatever that term refers to--was aware of the presence of these cages seems to me quite hollow. I am impressed by the fact that once you as a responsible official saw these for yourself that you spontaneously and immediately ordered their dismantling and moved to change the personnel who had not only tolerated but exploited the presence of these uncivilized devices.

Our Chapter's Patients Rights Task Force continues to have serious objections to Harrisburg State Hospital's policies that abridge the freedom of patients, and we will be in touch with you about these matters over the coming weeks, but your action with respect to Polk State School gives heart to all of us working to insure a dignified existence for patients confined to state hospitals.

Sincerely,


Robert B. Dennis
Chapter President

american civil liberties union of pennsylvania

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50 YEARS 1920-1970