

April 24, 1973

Received in
SECRETARY'S OFFICE

APR 26 1973

DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE

Ref. to _____

The Honorable Milton J. Shapp
Governor of Pennsylvania
225 Capitol Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Governor Shapp:

I am writing in the hope that I may be helpful in a constructive way as you consider requests for reinstatement of Dr. James McClelland as Superintendent of Polk State School and Hospital. I shall, therefore, refrain from criticism of administrative action already taken and confine myself to comment that would not be otherwise available to you.

You are concerned, and rightly so, with the professional competence and judgment of Dr. McClelland. Let me speak, therefore, to these matters. What I have to say in his behalf reflects not only my personal belief but also the collective judgment of professional staff in special education here at the college.

Clarion State College, as you know, has one of the outstanding programs in the Commonwealth to prepare specialists for work in the field of mental retardation. Part of the strength in our program resides in its proximity to Polk. We have enjoyed warm and professionally satisfying relationships with Polk State School and Hospital under Dr. McClelland's leadership. Their doors have been open to us. They have freed staff to come to the college for additional teaching, and where we have needed professional help, they have cooperated fully to assist us.

Some so-called "old line" state hospital administrators have been criticized for providing essentially custodial care to the patients. Dr. McClelland was an exception in that he has introduced many innovations in the treatment of retarded people. He pioneered in the development of training programs for the profoundly retarded. He surrounds himself with very able people and is a fine educator himself. He has installed at Polk the finest audiology section and facility of any school for the retarded in the state. The training program for profoundly retarded has developed with the strong advocacy of Dr. McClelland and in these days of fiscal stringency he has vowed to maintain it. All of these are measures of the man's commitment to the duties assigned to him.

April 24, 1973

As the administrator of another, but different, public institution, I understand his dilemma--the need to accomplish so much with so little. Conditions exist in all public institutions that none of us desire. They become necessary by virtue of the circumstances in which one finds himself. In Dr. McClelland's case, they are traceable to insufficient staff--a condition that you and others recognize. The present options available are few at Polk for treating the severely retarded and psychotic patient. But I can assure you that Dr. McClelland is a sincere, dedicated, compassionate man.

I am persuaded, therefore, that a serious error has been made in removing him from office, and that those responsible for the decision were misguided. It is my hope that the facts I have enumerated will be of assistance to you as you consider requests for the reinstatement of Dr. McClelland.

Sincerely,

James Gemmell
President

G/w

cc: Hon. Helene Wohlgemuth ✓