

Our Readers Write



Polk Hospital Firing 'Hasty'

EDITOR:

I WRITE THIS letter to protest the firing of Dr. James McClelland, administrator of the Polk State School and Hospital for Mentally Retarded Children.

As a Dietetic Intern in a program operated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I served in a number of State institutions including Polk. More specifically, I worked as a food service supervisor in one of the patient buildings at Polk, and I spent a good portion of my time in the patient wards.

One of the many things I learned from my experience at Polk was that retarded patients occasionally hurt themselves or other children, inadvertently. One way to prevent injury would be to provide constant, personal supervision. A more realistic method of protecting patients, particularly in underfunded, understaffed institutions, is to confine the "aggressors" for short periods.

I DID SEE "king-sized playpens" (which Secretary Wohlgemuth called "cages") in use at Polk. However, the structures were located in the same lounge with the rest of the patients, they were large enough for the patient to move around comfortably, and I never saw the pens used for disciplining patients, only protecting them.

I think Secretary Wohlgemuth acted with unjustifiable haste when she concluded that the Polk patients were being treated inhumanely and that Dr. McClelland condoned cruelty in the institution.

During my five weeks at Polk, I saw so much warmth and constructive work and I cannot believe Dr. McClelland either cruel or incompetent.

—Margaret A. Moss,
State College.

Polk Rally Supports McClelland

POLK (AP) — More than 300 persons rallied at a nearby fairgrounds yesterday in a show of support for Dr. James H. McClelland, ousted superintendent of Polk State School and Hospital.

McClelland, 58, was fired Tuesday by state Welfare Secy. Helene Wohlgemuth, who said she made a surprise visit to the institution and found acutely retarded patients confined in wooden, playpen like enclosures.

"There is no better evidence of the programs and leadership directed by Dr. McClelland than this almost spontaneous turnout in his behalf," state Sen. Richard Frame told the sun-splashed demonstrators, who cheered and waved placards.

Frame, Franklin Republican and majority leader of the Senate, was an unscheduled speaker at the rally, described by planners as a "grass roots show of support" for McClelland.

Others present included employees of the institution, parents of mentally retarded patients and officials of the Venango County branch of the Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children.

cc: Secretary
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Klein
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