

Westminster College
New Wilmington, Pa. 16142

DEPARTMENT OF
RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Received in
SECRETARY'S OFFICE

APR 24 1973

DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE

Ref. to _____

April 23, 1973

Dear Mrs. Wohlgemuth:

Please note the enclosed letter I am sending to a number
of newspapers in the commonwealth.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph M. H.
Joseph M. H. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
April 23, 1973

Dear Sir:

Our son Martin, 18, is a resident at Polk State School & Hospital. Martin is autistic. He treats people as objects. He has no sense of right or wrong. He is not educable, cannot talk, is highly hyperactive, and at times becomes unmanageable. Before he was institutionalized at the age of 7, he gleefully destroyed two litters of kittens by hurling them against the bedroom walls. When discovered, he exhibited absolutely no remorse. Had his baby sister been a victim of his violence, the response would have been the same. Were Martin to be returned to his home (is this the PARC's aim for all such children?), he would require full-time supervision. But my wife would be unable to cope with his superior strength and agility, should he become violent or decide on impulse to run away.

Mrs. H [REDACTED] and I thank God for Polk State School & Hospital. We have been delighted with the excellent care Martin has received there. We have found members of the staff to be compassionate and dedicated. Thanks to mild sedatives, prescribed by a staff physician, Martin has not required restraints or confinement. But we would have no objection whatever should it become necessary to place him in one of the playpens (cages??) which have aroused the ire of Welfare Secretary Helene Wohlgemuth. What alternative measures does Mrs. Wohlgemuth suggest for preventing emotionally disturbed patients from harming others and themselves? It is well enough for her to moralize from her ivory tower in Harrisburg. I would like to see her on the firing line, where the action is—as an attendant in one of the cottages, confronted by an aggressive patient in the midst of an explosive temper tantrum. How would she handle the situation?

Yesterday I drove to Polk with Martin's Easter basket. At least three patients stopped me in the halls and asked with great concern if I thought Dr. McClelland would be coming back. I told them I hoped so. They inquired if I had signed the petition in Central imploring the governor to rescind Mrs. Wohlgemuth's arbitrary action and restore Dr. McClelland to his post. I assured them that I had, and further that I would write a letter to Governor Shapp.

In conference with a top administrator, I was told that Dr. McClelland has virtually the unanimous support of both staff and patients. My source sees the removal as the outcome of a clash in philosophy whereby the Harrisburg establishment is seeking to replace medical doctor-administrators with specialists in social work. This they have now succeeded in accomplishing at all Pennsylvania institutions for the mentally handicapped, Polk being the last. The "cages" were a pretext—an excuse to justify the long-plotted action. Actually, when Secretary Wohlgemuth made her surprise visit two weeks ago only 5 pens were in use—1 each at 5 of the school's 39 residence units. Only one of the 5' cubicles had a top—and this was to control an excessively aggressive female patient who is only 4'6" tall (so that standing upright was possible). At no time was any of the pens padlocked. And never were patients shut up for hours and forgotten. When their temper outbursts subsided, they were released. Dr. McClelland acceded to the demand that the objectionable devices be eliminated. Still, a few days later he was fired—in a peremptory manner which blatantly violated his civil rights.

Dr. McClelland has enjoyed a distinguished career as superintendent at Polk. Under his leadership the Polk State School & Hospital has come to be recognized as one of the finest institutions of its type in the nation. In view of his outstanding success—and Mrs. Wohlgemuth's haughty intransigence—perhaps the situation should be reversed. Dr. McClelland should be reinstated and Mrs. Wohlgemuth should be given the ax.

Joseph M. H.
Joseph M. H. [REDACTED]