

AAIDD

American Association on Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities

June 11, 2007

Personal Independence Commission
Hearing Room 3, MO State Capitol
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to present public testimony today on behalf of the MO Chapter of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD). For more than 130 years, this respected organization has been a leader in promoting the implementation of evidence based state-of-the-art practices for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

We understand that this Commission has the charge through an Executive Order, to make recommendations for policy changes to implement Title II of the ADA as it relates to the Supreme Court's June 1999 Olmstead decision. We are here today, to express our deepest concerns regarding Governor Matt Blunt and the Department of Mental Health's reversal of the decision to close Bellefontaine Habilitation Center.

Instead, the decision has been made to enter into a public-private partnership to provide a new "state-of-the-art" 120-bed residential program on the Bellefontaine campus. If this plan moves forward, the work completed by this Personal Independence Commission since 2001 would not only be set back by decades, but would fly in the face of the mission of this Commission to work toward transitioning individuals with disabilities out of such congregate settings. AAIDD urges you to work with Governor Blunt and the Department of Mental Health to rescind the recent order to build this large segregated institution.

More than a century ago, it was considered state-of-the-art to institutionalize individuals with developmental disabilities in large congregate settings. The belief was that this practice would provide individuals with a safe and protected haven. At the same time, providers of services considered it easier to concentrate their menu of services as well as staffing to these individuals in an institution. Just because the practice made it easier for professionals to serve people in such settings, does not mean it results in the best outcomes for people and is often a

violation of these citizens' human and civil rights. AAIDD and the Arc have published the following position statements:

- "Large congregate facilities are unnecessary and inappropriate for our constituents, regardless of type or severity of disability.
- People must receive individualized supports, including housing, as they leave institutions, as well as their family homes. Public funds must be shifted from institutions to the community to accommodate these moves.
- The health and safety of people must be safeguarded wherever they live, including when a facility is closing, and whenever a person is transitioning from one living environment to another.
- A full and active life supported by caring relationships should minimize the occurrence of problem behaviors in people with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities.
- Our constituents must be afforded the same rights, dignity, respect, and opportunities as other older people in their communities.
- Our constituents must be free from the fear of inappropriate institutionalization due to age-associated decline or infirmity."

It is AAIDD's position that, "All our constituents have the right to participate fully in their diverse communities. Needed supports should be available and affordable so that each individual with disabilities can live, learn, work, and play with others who do not have disabilities." There is no data or research that has been published in at least the last 40 years, that leads AAIDD to believe that it is appropriate to continue to "house" individuals in center-based settings. No matter how "state-of-the-art" a building, it is our experience, that this is not state-of-the-art practice. In fact, to date, ten states have completely closed their institutions and a number of other states are proactive in downsizing their institutions.

On the other hand, there has been extensive evidence-based research completed in the last 40 years, that has demonstrated that individuals with developmental disabilities actually fair better in their communities when they have appropriate supports. While we acknowledge that technical supports are not always available in the community, it would be a wiser investment of tax payer dollars to focus efforts on developing community capacity rather than buildings and programs that have been proven unsuccessful and out-dated practice.

AAIDD welcomes the opportunity to work with this Commission to move your mission forward to transition individuals with disabilities from institutional settings to the community.

Thank you,

AAIDD