

Justice Department's aggressive actions force habilitation centers to close

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The article “Northwest center for disabled is closed” (Nov. 27) brings to light a national issue about the care of people with severe mental and physical disabilities.

Part of the real story behind the nationwide closing of habilitation centers is the aggressive action by the Department of Justice. The department is grossly misinterpreting the 1999 Supreme Court Olmstead decision, which states: “We emphasize that nothing in the ADA or its implementing regulations condones termination of institutional settings for persons unable to handle or benefit from community settings. ... Nor is there any federal requirement that community-based treatment be imposed on patients who do not desire it.”

Contrary to this clear statement, the Justice Department is using this decision to threaten states with lawsuits claiming that the civil rights of the residents are being violated, just because they live in one of these centers. To avoid a Justice Department lawsuit, governors of states are settling out of court and agreeing to close habilitation centers. The fact that these residents are thriving in these centers is being ignored.

Across the nation, families rely on the comprehensive, life-saving services offered at habilitation centers. We are greatly alarmed by the misguided, aggressive actions of the Justice Department that are putting our family members in harm’s way. Families are to be the primary decision makers about services received.

Mary A. Vitale • Florissant

For those who need them, habilitation centers are a godsend

Posted: Monday, February 7, 2011 6:09 pm

stltoday.com St. Louis Post-Dispatch online article

Habilitation Centers are simply 'Gated Communities' such as Lindberg Place near Page and Lindbergh Blvd. They are groups of homes set in a pasteural environment. The difference is that the residents are non-voting, mentally retarded individuals. I have a son who resides at Bellefontaine Habilitation Center. He loves it there. He has severe behavioral problems and knows that the staff can help him when he is out of control. His behavior issues would be difficult to handle in an isolated community home and he be a danger to himself.

Habilitation centers are not for everyone, but for those who need them they are a Godsend. I am scared to death of what would happen to my son if they are closed.

Jeanette Craig

St. Louis County

News-Leader.com Springfield, MO

14 February 2011

Lindstrom: Habilitation centers don't need bill's fix

11:00 PM, Feb. 14, 2011

I have serious concerns with the proposed Senate Bill 56, HB421 and HB411 that have been filed by Sen. Scott Rupp, Missouri Senate; Rep. Rick Stream and Rep. Zachary Wyatt, Missouri House of Representatives. These bills propose closing all state habilitation centers and wasting more tax dollars toward "fixing" something that is not broken. Specifically, I want to highlight we have attempted to reach Rupp, and he continues to decline discussions with the parents across the state who serve as guardians for our loved ones receiving services from these habilitation centers. Will you meet with us, senator?

The guardians have personally experienced the quality care for our family members with developmental disabilities. I am concerned with the direction that the senator is heading. For someone who says he cares for these individuals, he has not done his homework. He should realize the community options available today are not sufficient for "everyone." He should be willing and open to hearing all sides. These types of centers are the only safety net for some, and they provide quality care to the state's most vulnerable citizens.

These individuals are diagnosed with multiple issues: developmental disabilities, mental illness, behavioral disorders and fragile medical conditions. Many of them have tried care in their homes and communities. These services provide them the least restrictive environment and quality care in habilitation centers. So while I appreciate his effort toward seeking "community options," this is their community. Assisted living facilities across the state who serve people with disabilities and senior citizens communities for our elderly have communities with specialized care, shared housing, common living areas. There is no difference!

There are individuals in crisis situations in need of these resources. [The Department of Mental Health] has said these facilities are needed. But the DMH has decided to limit new admissions to hab centers. Why? ... Guardians have shared with me they are not told about this great service. This is wrong! Those

that need these services are being denied their right to receive the help they need -- it is their choice and right according to ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act].

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There are good community options for many; we support them for those who need them. However, if a habilitation center has proven to best meet the needs of an individual, they should have that option.

Senator, are you willing to throw these fragile individuals out into community living options that in many cases have already failed or refused them? It took years to get them the great care they are receiving. Now you are threatening this. If you truly are concerned about these fragile people, take the time to meet with the parents and guardians who depend on these centers. We're coming to Jeff City today. Lives will be lost and it will be at the cost of your negligence.

So I plead to Missouri legislators. Vote "No" on Senate Bill 56. Do not waste our tax dollars on more consulting for something that isn't broken. These are not institutions, they are communities.

Editor's note: According to Sen. Scott Rupp, he has had numerous conversations with people both against and supporting the legislation. He points out that the public hearing on the bill hasn't been scheduled as yet. Rupp's office can be contacted at 1-866-271-2844 or e-mail to scott.rupp@senate.mo.gov.

ST.LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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Residents haven't changed

My brother has been a resident at Bellefontaine Habilitation Center since October 1962. He is profoundly retarded and physically handicapped; he cannot speak or walk. Throughout these many years, my brother has benefited from the care and services provided by the staff at Bellefontaine.

In 2006, after a year of meetings and hearings, it was determined that habilitation centers provide the most effective environment in which to deliver needed services to individuals like my brother, and that the habilitation centers should remain open and fully funded.

Now legislators are saying that new information indicates that these individuals would be better served in a community setting. My brother has not changed. His needs are the same.

How can legislators tell me what is best for my brother? Do they think I would fight to keep my brother in an environment that was not best for him? How many of the legislators clamoring to close the habilitation centers have the knowledge and experience required to make this decision?

Legislators should not try to balance the budget by depriving these individuals of the care they deserve and are receiving at Bellefontaine Habilitation Center.

The state should keep the centers open and fully funded.

Roseanne Dickey • St. Charles

Letters to the editor, February 10, 2011

St. Louis Post Dispatch

Posted: Thursday, February 10, 2011 12:00 a.m.

Habilitation centers should be expanded, not closed by the state

Missouri's habilitation centers were originally established and intended to be life-long residences. Many residents at Bellefontaine Habilitation Center have lived there for 50 or more years. That refutes the current claim that "they were never intended as lifetime homes."

The selflessness of the "greatest generation" in providing tax dollars for the betterment of lives at Bellefontaine is visibly lacking in society's responsiveness to the needs of the most vulnerable today. This sad fact is apparent in the gradual eating away of funds intended for the most vulnerable and an unwillingness to prioritize and expand successful programs. Over time, we have observed their funds being directed to other areas, including salary and benefit increases for upper management, while neglecting direct-care staff, full-time doctors, nurses and professional therapists, as originally intended.

We won't need more legislation to limit choices for the residents until we see the same commitment to similar legislation to cut back salaries and benefits for our civic leaders at all levels of public service.

The residents of the habilitation centers enjoy communities that afford acceptance in familiar environments with on-site necessary services, as originally promised, as well as opportunities to develop and maintain their level of innate abilities.

It is obvious that the habilitation centers need to not only be kept open, but they should be expanded to meet the needs of those on the lengthy waiting lists desperate for lifetime homes. Where are the voices of the people who are willing to speak up for the most vulnerable?

Jean A. Ambrow • St. Louis

News-Leader.com Springfield MO
12 Feb 2011

Habilitation centers provide vital service

11:00 PM, Feb. 12, 2011 |

Families across the state are extremely alarmed with Senate Bill 56 filed by [state] Sen. Scott Rupp, R-Wentzville. It calls for the closing of Missouri habilitation centers, which are homes for people diagnosed with profound mental retardation.

It is appalling that Rupp is ignoring recommendations contained in the August 2006 report from the Missouri Mental Health Committee and the November 2006 report from the Missouri Mental Health Task Force. Both support keeping habilitation centers open. The best evidence that habilitation centers are needed now and in the future is in the thriving lives of the current residents, and in new families wanting these services.

Families coming to habilitation centers for crisis services are thrilled with the care received and comment that their loved ones are doing better than they have done in years because of all the specialized supports located on one campus. They want their family member to stay at a habilitation center, but they are denied that choice. Closing the state's habilitation centers is like pulling the plug on the life-support system that allows these residents to live a life of dignity.

Senate Bill 56 is hazardous to the health of Missouri citizens diagnosed with mental retardation.

Mary A. Vitale Florissant