

CARE OF THE DISABLED SHIFTS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Governor Quinn's planned closure of state operated homes for the disabled creates an unfunded mandate for police, paramedics, firefighters and hospitals. Just the populations of Jacksonville and Centralia Illinois centers will require over 100 new community homes. The flawed plan continues to focus on moving people out while giving communities no time to prepare. An attorney experienced with sad cases of systemic failure estimates a need for three years of preparation, not a small number of weeks or months.

The very real scenario of under-staffed community residences calling first responders (*911) for behavior problems, seizures, etc, creates additional demands on local services:

- First Responders deserve training, preparation and communication support for dealing with an increased population of special needs
- Front Line Residential Staff deserve training, reasonable pay and a better crisis plan than peers on-call
- Disabled Citizens deserve individualized effective communication, compassion and their civil rights

One city's chief of police called the scenario "compelling in its' implications." It certainly impacts dispatchers, officers, EMT/paramedics, firefighters and emergency rooms. Preparation for this added responsibility starts with training and awareness for all:

- Education; Descriptions, recognition, traits and limitations of specific disabilities
- Training; Specialized communication skills and effective techniques
- Planning; Specific procedures for deaf, blind, mute, behavioral, physically impaired, mentally impaired and compound disabilities

In its' zeal to shutter state facilities, the Quinn Administration is skipping key safety and transitional steps of their own plan (Blueprint For System Redesign Update, May 2012). The blueprint reminds the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) that many corrective steps must occur before facilities are closed and residents displaced:

- Strengthen community-based supports for people with extraordinary behavioral challenges
- Adopt policies that help individuals & providers transition to HCBS (home and community based service) alternatives

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The MPA is a non-profit organization founded over 40 years ago with the purpose of assisting and caring for those with complex and profound disabilities. The Murray Parent's Association is also known as "Murray Parents and Friends"- a trusted voice for loved ones who call central Illinois home. MPA may be followed on Facebook.