

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 community-based structure needs more time to prepare before significant changes are made to the State's service delivery system. Time and time again, DHS has been told about lack of confidence and lack of accountability. DHS has been told to get statewide systems in order for quality assurance, consistency, efficiency and safety. The structural changes either have not occurred, or occur at a snail's pace. Often, through trial and error methods which are not acceptable for the fragile and disabled.

Yet, Governor Quinn is anxious to close State operated facilities (SODCs) and add the MOST fragile and MOST costly cases to the risks and challenges community providers already face. In "Blueprint For Change", reportedly the plan followed by DHS, all parties are reminded that significant preparation must be done before closures occur. The Administration has again placed less emphasis on repairing critical flaws in the delivery of services.

Projected cost savings from closures are overstated due to the intensive care needs of many SODC residents. To provide necessary care in less populated settings will be very expensive- way above planned reimbursement rates. Community providers are balking at this entire scenario as a result. There will be little-to-no funds re-allocated for strengthening the community network as they will be consumed in the flawed, current transition plans. Both the architect of the "Blueprint" (Human Research Services Institute, HSRI) and also the rehabilitation facilities themselves (Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, IARF) have pointed out that investment into community providers must come first- not from after-the-fact and from questionable savings projections. The Illinois Nurse's Association (INA) agrees. In our unified opinion, DHS must focus on quality of service delivery via dramatically improved consistency, documentation and accountability. Also to assure that fundamental changes like facility closures occur only after the community infrastructure is in place, funded and actually demonstrating the ability to take on the additional responsibilities and clients asked of them.

For More Information, Contact

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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 and viewed at www.murrayparentsassociation.com

