

Pennsylvania's Ongoing Assault on Institutions!

Governor Wolf has announced the forced closure of Hamburg State Center. His Department of Human Services is following the same compulsory involuntary procedure employed in the systematic elimination of the Western Center in Canonsburg, PA in 1992-2001 – the result was forced outplacement of unprepared residents into many equally unprepared alternative placements in the community and elsewhere, leading to the premature deaths of thirty-eight former residents (that we know of).

Investigation by the Auditor General in 1999 determined it was neither appropriate nor safe to remove the residents from Western Center, and asked DPW to conduct a study to ascertain whether sufficient group homes existed in the first place with sufficient intensive care services critical to the unique needs of these individuals. Auditor General Robert Casey, Jr., found that the State Department of Public Welfare was wrong in determining unilaterally that all residents were appropriate for community placement. His finding was ignored.

Institution demonization is and has been the anti-institutional mindset of the Department's entrenched policy makers since 1988. Rather than improve state centers (expand, reform, heighten scrutiny- see HB 1000, ***which never made it to the floor for a vote***) in order to appropriately accommodate the needs of the seriously involved developmentally disabled in critical need of out-of-home placement, the State continues to block admissions to, as well as to close its residential care and treatment centers.

It is no coincidence these closings have been accompanied by skyrocketing growth of waiting lists of tens of thousands of those in need of appropriate and

emergency out-of-home placement, as well as an unconscionable increase in financial costs and human suffering.

Read more: Letter from Laura Mooney, last president of the Western Center Parents Group, to the parents and relatives of Hamburg State Center.