



Speaking out for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
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VOR Weekly News Update

News and views for VOR advocates

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Coming Up: August Congressional District Work Period ("recess") provides great opportunity to invite your Senators and Representatives to visit your family members' homes! Seeing is believing.

VOR and You

1. Consider Giving the Gift of a VOR Membership

It is critically important to involve your family members and share with them all the hard work you do for VOR.

If you have children, brothers, sisters or other family members who are not members, give them the gift of a VOR membership which will give them the opportunity to see first-hand the compelling advocacy we do together and why supporting VOR is so important.

Provide them with the opportunity to see witness how we work together to protect the rights of all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including our family members and friends.

VOR will a personal note to all individuals who receive your gift of a VOR membership.

Please use the form below and begin giving today.

Send completed form to:

VOR 836 S. Arlington Heights Rd., #351

Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

Fax: 605-271-0445

[Online Membership Form](#)

I would like to give the gift of a VOR membership:

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Email: _____

Please add the following personal note:

FROM: Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

STATE NEWS

2. ILLINOIS: VOR affiliate launches great new website

The Murray Parents Association in Centralia, Illinois has launched a terrific new [website](#) designed to inform the public and engage advocates in its fight to save the Murray Developmental Center.

Murray Center is home to 274 residents. Over half have lived there for at least 20 years. These individuals have many complex needs that are well met by the Murray staff. More than half have a dual diagnosis of a developmental disability and a mental illness. Nearly half (45%) are non-- ambulatory.

According to the website, "The Governor's plan to place these vulnerable citizens into community placement puts them at risk for abuse and neglect. His plan includes shifting the balance from State Operated State Facilities (SODCs) to Community Based Placement and uses 2--4 bedroom facilities as its model. Those who cannot speak for themselves are particularly vulnerable in this type of setting. Those with dual diagnoses often have behavioral issues that are difficult to manage and can present safety issues for the individuals being served as well as the staff."

[For more information visit the Murray Parents Association website.](#)

[Links to state and national resources are available on VOR's website.](#)

3. New Jersey panel recommends closing two institutions for disabled

The Star-Ledger * July 23, 2012

A task force established by the governor and the Legislature announced plans today to close within five years state-run institutions for the developmentally disabled in Woodbridge and Totowa that house almost 700 residents and employ 2,600 workers.

Gov. Chris Christie and the Legislature established the group as a compromise in an effort to delay the closing of the Vineland Developmental Center, which the governor had initially proposed. As part of the agreement, the recommendations of the five-member panel are binding.

[Here's one publication's view of the results: Politics of North and South: How Van Drew Saved Vineland – Politics trumps policy in decision to close](#)

[Woodbridge and Totowa \(North Jersey\) developmental centers](#)

Related article:

[Christie's 'Taskforce on the Closing of New Jersey's Developmental Centers' decision is not progress: It's tragedy](#)

4. Connecticut - Backers: Replenish training school

The News Times * July 13, 2012 * Excerpts

(Advocacy Tip: Schedule a meeting with the Editorial Board of your local newspaper(s). This article is the result of such a meeting)

Tom Dwyer is 55 years old. He has spent more than half his life at Southbury Training School.

Along with mental disabilities, he is autistic. His sister, Martha Dwyer, said that before he went to the school, he wore a football helmet to protect his skull from his repeated head-banging.

Under the care Tom has gotten at the school, that's stopped, Martha said. "There's places to walk around, there's occupational and physical therapy," she said.

"Southbury is the perfect place for him," Tom's brother, Hugo Dwyer, said. The two spoke to The News-Times editorial board on Tuesday.

The Dwyers want Tom to stay at the training school for the rest of his life. But they -- like the families and guardians of the approximately 400 people living there -- fear the school will close before its residents are ready to leave.

They have a solution: Start admitting people to the school again -- something that hasn't happened since 1986.

"For people with more severe developmental disabilities, we think the best solution is to stay at Southbury Training School," said David Kassel, spokesman for the Southbury Training School Home and Parents Association.

Southbury Training School -- whose staff has cared for thousands of people with developmental disabilities at its 1,600-acre campus since it opened in the 1930s -- is now in endgame mode.

It cannot admit new residents. It is now under court order to make sure all the residents at the schools -- and their families and guardians -- are fully informed about the advantages of living in a community-based group home.

The training school residents are old -- the average age there is 63. More die every year. As a result, the number of people living the school is declining. At a certain point -- perhaps within a decade -- there will be so few people living there that it will make no sense, financially or therapeutically, to keep Southbury Training School open.

And that, they say, is what opponents of the school want -- to close the school soon.

"People are feeling some pressure." Kassel said.

To counter this, the association argues for the school to start admitting people again. Association members point out that as residents of group homes age, their medical problems increase. The school, which has its own medical and dental clinics and offers its residents round-the-clock medical care, could be the best place for them.

"There a wide spectrum of disability," said Hugo Dwyer. "In community settings, you tend not to see people with more serve disabilities."

Re-opening the school to new residents could shrink the waiting list the state now has for people who want to move into group homes, Kassel said. They'd be moving to a place with high quality care and an uncrowded, quiet atmosphere, he said.

[Read more](#)

5. CALIFORNIA: VOR and the Parent Hospital Association of Sonoma Developmental Center's Position in Support of California Senate Bill 1522

VOR and PHA-Sonoma * July 26, 2012

VOR is a national organization that advocates for high quality care and human rights of all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD). The Parent Hospital Association of Sonoma Developmental Center (PHA Sonoma) is a VOR affiliate. Together we support the right of individuals with ID/DD to choose from a full array of residential care.

We join together in our support for SB 1522, a bill calling for even more developmental center resident protections.

[Read More.](#)

6. NEW YORK: Lawsuits Detail Abuse of Disabled in State Care

***New York Times* * July 24, 2012**

Employees at a residential treatment center for the developmentally disabled in Albany restricted a man to a small mat on the floor, intentionally starved him, and beat him with blue painted sticks they called magic wands.

At an adult home in Brooklyn, a disabled man nearly choked to death on a corn cob after being left in the care of a teenager. He lost nearly 50 pounds when employees did not manage his diet.

These are the claims of parents of people with disabilities who filed lawsuits this month against staff members at those facilities for injuries they say resulted from abuse and neglect. Their lawsuits, filed separately in Federal District Court in Albany and Federal District Court in Brooklyn, and seeking unspecified monetary damages, claim that the abuse continued even after repeated complaints.

An investigation last year by *The New York Times* found that the agency that finances and oversees the care of people with disabilities, the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, failed to take complaints

seriously or curtail the abuse of its residents, resulting in numerous injuries and deaths.

Last year, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo forced the resignation of Max E. Chmura, the commissioner of the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, after learning of the Times investigation, and said his administration would undertake a broad review of the state's care. This year, lawmakers passed legislation, proposed by Mr. Cuomo, to create a new state agency to police the abuse and neglect of vulnerable populations.

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