



Speaking out for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities



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VOR Weekly News Update

News and views for VOR Advocates

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As reported, VOR is partnering with *EP Magazine* in celebration of our 30th Anniversary. This partnership means some exciting recognition for sponsors who have opportunity to reach EP Magazine's 300,000 readers and VOR members through VOR's website, social media, publication and conference materials.

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2. Join Us! Register for VOR's Annual Conference Today!

Thanks to all who have already registered for VOR's Annual Conference and Washington Initiative in June 2013.

[Complete event details and registration opportunities \(online and by mail\) are available on our website.](#)

Help VOR celebrate its 30th Anniversary by attending our annual event.

Join us! Please [register today!](#)

State News

3. PETITION: [Protect Sheltered Workshops](#)

Source: *Missouri Association for Intellectual Disabilities (AID)*

No matter where you live, sheltered workshops need your support throughout the United States.

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD), which includes mental retardation. Down syndrome. and cerebral

palsy, have the right to choose where they work and where they live. We believe that sheltered workshops are the only places where some individuals can work and function as productive members of the community.

Legislators in some states are already attempting to eliminate funding to sheltered workshops and force people with disabilities into supported/competitive employment. A vast number of individuals with I/DD who are capable of supported employment have already transitioned into the community. Sheltered workshops throughout the U. S. provide a safe environment for adults with I/DD to work, interact with their peers, and gain a sense of accomplishment. Many workshops also provide transportation, off-site day habilitation programs, and opportunities to experience new things such as taking a vacation or going on a camping trip. Individuals who choose to work in sheltered workshops are happy, safe, fulfilled, and are among their friends and peers.

Competitive employment is not the answer for everyone. We need sheltered workshops! We should be creating more employment opportunities for people with disabilities – not eliminating options.

Let your voice be heard and speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. ADA and Section 504 in no way meant to take choice or any other kind of employment option away from persons with I/DD. It is our responsibility to provide opportunities and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. Do not deprive them of their choices and force them into settings which will diminish their quality of life. Help us protect sheltered workshops across the nation!

* [Read more](#)

* [Sign the Petition](#)

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* [Learn more about the difference between Competitive, Supported, and Sheltered Workshops](#)

State News

4. Virginia: Virginia jails house more mentally ill than hospitals; More people diagnosed with mental illness are in jail than in state's mental health facilities

Daily Press * March 16, 2013

Excerpts

Fifty years ago, in 1963, passage of the federal Community Mental Health Act was intended to create community supports for the mentally ill so that they could receive appropriate treatment outside of institutions. In Virginia, it led to 1968 legislation to close state facilities and transfer resources to the community. "I pledged my career to that. I walk away from that now. **It's not working,**" said **Chuck Hall, executive director of the Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board**, one of 40 boards established to provide mental health services. Dr. Baltej Gill, senior medical director for the HNNCSB concurred. "**It's a national trend that went wrong.** You're pulling your hair out to put people in the hospital."

In keeping with the promotion of "self-determination, empowerment, recovery, resilience, health and the highest possible level of consumer participation in all aspects of community life," as stated in a 2011 state report, Virginia scaled back on beds in behavioral health facilities and psychiatric hospitals. In 1976, there were 5,967 in-patient beds in state facilities; in 2011, just 1,252.

The failure of de-institutionalization

Many more of the mentally ill are housed at Hampton Roads Regional Jail. whose census of

local inmates hovers around 900, with 400 drawn from Hampton and Newport News. More than one-third has a mental health diagnosis — twice the 15 percent incidence in the general population — and half of those have serious illnesses, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Hall dubs the jail "the state's largest mental health hospital." The Portsmouth facility, built in 1998 to relieve overcrowding in jails in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Hampton and Newport News, has become the go-to place for the mentally ill and those with severe medical needs from those jurisdictions.

"We should all consider that unacceptable," said David Coe, director of Colonial Behavioral Health, the community services board for four Peninsula communities; his agency serves between 40 and 50 held at the Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail. "The scope and scale are different, but the issues are similar," he said.

"It's trans-institutionalization. In the 1960s and 1970s the mentally ill were warehoused in big institutions. Now they're institutionalized in jails," said Virginia Executive Director Mira Signer of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, NAMI. "We're spending millions of dollars providing 'treatment' to people in jails. They're no place to treat someone with a mental illness."

The problem is cyclical. Without sufficient community supports — the state's 2009 budget eliminated \$2.6 million in funding, and the community service boards endured 5 percent cuts in the biennial budgets of 2008 and 2010 — the mentally ill often end up on the streets or in jail, while others remain confined after they're ready for release.

[Read full article](#)

5. New Jersey: [Governor's decision not to revisit center closing is unacceptable](#) (Excellent letter to the editor)

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**Burlington County Times (NJ) * March 20, 2013 *
By Elaine Ferguson, First vice president,
Association for Hunterdon Developmental Center**

During a recent visit to a group home for the developmentally disabled, Gov. Chris Christie stated that “he would not revisit” the decision to close two of New Jersey’s seven developmental centers “just because three or 400 people showed up at a hearing.” It is extremely disturbing that Christie maintains this position, never having visited any of our state’s developmental centers to witness the quality of care the staff provides residents in a safe, loving environment.

Having testified before the Governor’s Task Force on Developmental Center Closure, it is clear that it was no more than a drill of political wheeling and dealing to determine which centers would be closed, rather than to assess if they should be closed at all.

Living here are our society’s most fragile individuals. Their unique needs cannot be adequately met in the community. They cannot speak or advocate for themselves because they have profound intellectual disabilities — they’re not just “slow.”

It is all the more disheartening then that Christie has callously disregarded the pleas of family members who speak for them, to allow their loved ones to remain in the developmental centers they’ve known as home.

Not only is this unconscionable, it is unacceptable.

Read related Letters to the Editor:

[Christie targets New Jersey's developmental centers](#)

[Christie shows callousness toward severely disabled](#)

[National News](#)

[6. Future Of Disability Rights Enforcement](#)

Unclear

Disability Scoop * March 19, 2013

As the nation's top civil rights attorney, Thomas Perez made disability issues a priority. His nomination this week to head the U.S. Department of Labor, however, is bringing an uncertain future for disability rights enforcement.

President Barack Obama nominated Perez Monday to be the next secretary of labor. If confirmed, the move would leave Perez's current job as assistant attorney general of the civil rights division at the U.S. Department of Justice wide open.

Since he was confirmed to the post in 2009, Perez has taken on disability rights head first.

Under his leadership, the Justice Department has participated in legal actions in more than two-dozen states to uphold the rights of those with disabilities to live in the community whenever possible, in addition to bringing first-ever hate crimes charges on the basis of disability.

"It's really been night and day," said Curt Decker, executive director of the National Disability Rights Network, of the Justice Department's efforts under Perez as opposed to his predecessors. "He really has built the department and made them extremely aggressive on disability issues."

Decker, who's group is an umbrella organization for the protection and advocacy organizations in each state, said Perez has been an ally to disability advocates, not only by bringing cases, but also backing existing ones.

Under previous administrations, Decker said federal prosecutors would often identify problems at state-run institutions and reach settlements forcing the states to pump millions of dollars into fixing the facilities. By contrast, under Perez, states including Virginia and

Georgia have agreed to essentially dismantle their institutionally-focused systems for people with disabilities and establish a complement of community-based offerings.

Beyond that, Perez's division has pursued cases to ensure accessibility of sidewalks, hotels and stadiums. They've taken a stand against unnecessary segregation in sheltered workshops and his department worked to clarify the rights of students with disabilities to bring service dogs to school, among other issues.

Perez's efforts have stretched far beyond the people directly affected by the cases the Justice Department has pursued under his tenure, said Mark Perriello, president and CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities.

Next up, Perez will go before the U.S. Senate in a bid to be confirmed as the next labor secretary, a process which could be contentious amid concerns from Republicans that decisions — specifically on voting rights issues — were ideologically driven under his tenure at the Justice Department.

If confirmed, disability advocates say they are optimistic that Perez will be a strong voice for those with disabilities at the Labor Department, perhaps addressing issues like subminimum wage and the use of sheltered workshops.

Read Related News: [Justice Department's civil rights division disaster: What will Holder do now?](#) (*Washington Post Editorial*, "Right Turn, Jennifer Rubin's take from a conservative perspective.")

Research News

7. Disabled people struggle to get specialty health care

Disability Policy Consortium Research News Alert* Mathematica Policy Research * March 22, 2013

Both [Reuters](#) and the [Boston Globe](#) reported

on a new study by researchers at Baystate Medical Center revealing that doctors' offices were not equipped to handle people with disabilities, creating obstacles to routine medical care. "More than one in five specialty practices told referring doctors they couldn't accommodate a wheelchair-bound patient during phone surveys of 256 U.S. offices," Reuters reported.

VOR Editor's Note: [People with disabilities should be allowed to access Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities \(ICFs/ID\), where specialized health care and other services are readily available, as outpatients.](#)

8. Aggression A Struggle For 1 In 2 With Autism

Disability Scoop * March 18, 2013

More than half of kids and adolescents with autism are physically aggressive and new research suggests that sleep, sensory and other underlying issues may be responsible for the behaviors.

In a [study](#) of 1,584 children with autism ages 2 to 17, researchers report this month in the journal *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* that about 53 percent were aggressive.

The report is based on an assessment of children enrolled in the Autism Treatment Network, a nationwide network of care centers for kids with the developmental disorder. Parents were asked whether or not their child intentionally hit or bit others or demonstrated similar types of physical aggression. Then, researchers analyzed other clinical assessments and parent-submitted data on the children to identify trends differentiating those who were aggressive from those who were not.

[Read more](#)

Quotable

"Happiness is not a state you arrive at. but a

manner of traveling." ~ Margaret Lee Runbeck

Calendar Reminders

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* [Sunday, June 9, 2013](#)

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* [Begins Monday, June 10, 2013](#)

VOR Washington Initiative (Begins Monday, June 10, 2013) * Washington, D.C. [Details online.](#)

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