

Hello, my name is Mary Wills, Thank you for allowing us to have this time to speak with you today. My sister-in-law, Sandy Wills is 67 yrs old and has lived at ICF/IDD State Centers since she was 10 years old. With Sandy's severe disability she required much specialized care, with the help of doctors and agencies my In-laws made the best decision possible for Sandy. 57Yrs later this is still the best Home for Sandy and she has a wonderful life.

I am also President of the A.C.E. Family and Friends Association from Ebensburg Center. A.C.E. which once stood for Altoona, Cresson, and Ebensburg, but the only center remaining is Ebensburg. The reason is **not** due to lack of a need for the care, but the lack of the service agencies giving the families the complete information about their choices. Presently the only way to get someone into the State Centers is by court order.

The State Centers are **very** good at caring for people with severe disabilities. They have trained care givers, medical staff, social workers, dietary staff, and many others. When a worker sees a problem they convene a team to discuss the concerns and how to help solve the problem. Some clients have major medical conditions along with the mental disabilities. We have some people at the Centers that need one-on-one care or even 2 on one, due to major medical/mental disabilities. We are ensuring the safety of the clients in the best way possible without over medicating them. Most severely disabled people need consistency. The care givers supporting the clients often work with the same people for years. These workers know when something is wrong with the client by their mannerisms even if the client is nonverbal. Example: Sandy takes temper tantrums, like a 2 year old, during which she can and has hurt herself and others. A familiar staff can see Sandy getting upset before she starts and redirect her to avoid a uncontrollable outburst of anger.

We have many activities at the centers, movies, dances, religious services, work programs, some center have swimming pool, basketball courts, and many more activities to make the clients life enjoyable. Clients are able to take trips off grounds to Baseball games, Zoo, Parks, Fishing, Shopping, Restaurants...what ever they like.

The care and activities provided at the State Centers, often do not happen at Group homes , especially where there are only one or 2 workers at the home at a time. Clients must be taken to other locations for Doctors, work programs, education and also there are no “teams” to solve problems. No nurses to secure and properly dispense medications. The workers at group homes are underpaid and have fewer benefits, which leads to workers moving on to other jobs for monetary reasons which then snowballs to a much higher turn over rate, thus causing staff to be less experienced ,a lack of staff training also makes it hard to have needed consistency.

As we attempted to thwart a rogue Legislative attack and preserve our State Centers. We spoke to Pennsylvania Voters at Churches, festivals, businesses, and community gatherings to collect over 10,000 signatures in a little over 3 months on a petition, which we will present to you here today, As the voters signed the petition to keep the State Centers open they would often say, “ Where will these people go? Why do they want to close them? These State Centers are needed because some of the people cannot be taken care of in Group Homes.” We also talked to many people that worked at group homes and the prison system. The Group home workers said they do not have the training and the staff to properly care for the disabled with major medical conditions or complex mental disabilities. They must call the police or ambulance when the client gets out of control because they have no backup workers on site to assist. Sometimes the Police unfamiliar with the circumstances arrive and if the client is out of control, drastic action are taken needlessly, ending in a disabled person's death. When the disabled persons, only supposed “crime” was not being capable of understanding the police orders. We talked to Prison guards saying they have mentally disabled prisoners that should have been in a State Center not prison, because they never had the adult mental ability to know right from wrong.

The choice to live at home, in a Group Home, or a ICF/IDD State Center should be options for all families with young adults with severe mental disability. Most of the Clients at the Center have lived there most of their lives. This is their Home, not an institution, it is Community Living for the disabled. The same as a Senior Citizen Community Living Center that serve the needs of the elderly.

As I was going around getting signatures I have seen the greater need to open the doors for the younger disabled adults who need professional around the clock supervision to help them with their disabilities and medical care. A place where they can enjoy life without the dangers of hurting themselves or others. We have some younger clients at the Centers that have been court ordered into the centers that have been helped in many ways. Joey Jennings is a prime example. When the group home does not serve their needs the ICF/IDD State Center should be there for them without the costly and needless court fight and it should always be an option, that the families, should be aware is available to them. The Social Workers should be able to help, the families make the best choice for the disabled person to get the skilled care for the best life possible. The State Centers can provide care to many more, without much additional cost because the building and the services are already set up and able to serve more. For Example: The cost of heating and maintaining a building with 10 people is the same for 30 people or an empty building.

We have so many more life stories and reasons for why we are all here today, and we have only touched upon a few of the reason in this limited time. So we ask you to please take the time to visit the ICF/IDD State Centers and see what they have to offer. We have the ability to offer this level of care to many more clients in need who are on the waiting list. We ask you to please let us have more input in the very important decisions concerning the State Centers future and come see why we are fighting so hard to keep the State Centers open and to guarantee this **Option to Choose ICF/IDD State Centers.**