

August 31, 2019

To: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Editor

Since learning of the planned closure of Polk Center, my emotions have ranged from shock to anger to sickness. It is unconscionable that the state shows total disregard for these fragile people in the name of money. To claim that uprooting them into neighborhood group homes is best for all shows a lack of empathy and compassion for these most vulnerable people. It also shows a lack of understanding of their individual needs.

Our sister has resided at Polk for 72 years. She is 80 years old and profoundly mentally disabled with a mental age of two. She is non-verbal, legally blind and needs total assistance ambulating. She has had breast cancer, an ankle fracture, rectal prolapse surgery twice. She has no teeth and takes medications for a variety of mental and physical disorders.

Her life at Polk is filled with activities and to imply otherwise is false. She shares a room with one woman. Her walls are decorated with family photos and pictures. She has her own furniture, stuffed animals, clothing, personal products, television. Staff escort her on regular outings such as the Pittsburgh Zoo, Gateway Clipper, museums, parks, restaurants and shopping centers. She attends an on-site senior center. Staff at Polk are wonderful, compassionate people who have worked there for years. Group homes have their place and are good for higher functioning people. But they not for everyone!

Our sister requires skilled care which she receives at Polk from the dedicated people who know and love her. We don't believe her physical, mental and medical needs can be sufficiently met in a group home, where turnover is frequent. My brother and I fear she would not survive if she is uprooted from her home and forced into a totally strange environment.

The Post-Gazette's suggestion in the Aug. 30 editorial "Polk Center's Future?" that the state should keep one or two cottages open at Polk to serve this community is a good one. It should be adopted.

Linda Murphy
Hampton Township

The letter was also signed by James Caye.