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RE: POLK CENTER AND WHITE HAVEN CLOSURES

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I am writing regarding my aunt, Faye, who resides at Polk Center in the Meadowside building. I have obtained guardianship of Faye through the court in Venango County.

Faye was born in 1947. She is the 4<sup>th</sup> born in a family of 5 children. Faye exhibited no problems at birth. During her youth, she had typical childhood illnesses, including measles, mumps, whooping cough, and chicken pox. Intellectual disability was first suspected before she was a year old. This was confirmed during an outpatient visit to Polk in 1950 when Faye was 3 years old. She had her first convulsion when she was about 10 years old and several severe convulsions following a flu attack in 1961 when she was 14 years old. While growing up, Faye did not play with other children except her siblings. When upset, she would have temper tantrums.

Faye attended a day care program in Franklin, Pa from 1959-1961. She stopped attending at the age of 13. Faye was temporarily admitted to Pry Nursing Home in West Sunbury in April of 1963. In August of 1963, Faye was admitted to Polk Center. She was 16 years old. She is now 72 years old. Polk Center has been her home for the last 56 years!

Faye has severe mental retardation, cerebral palsy with spastic paraparesis, internal rotation of the right lower extremity, scoliosis, right talipes, equinovarus, mild osteoarthritis of bilateral knees, hypothyroidism, mild dysphagia, has a history of atypical chest pain, mild seasonal allergies, and a hyperactive bladder. She is at high risk for falls and uses a walker and special shoes to ambulate. She uses a wheelchair with anti-tippers and a seat belt when leaving her building. Faye has no teeth and has a ground food textured diet. She is a picky-eater and needs staff assistance with meals.

Faye does not like any changes in her routine and becomes stressed when she is rushed, which leads to her being extremely irritable and sometimes violent. She doesn't always immediately respond to verbal requests. She won't do things until she is ready. She enjoys routine in her living area, likes her private time in her own room, and shows preference for staff, family, and select peers. She is very affectionate to people that she likes but does not respond well to people she does not know.

She also becomes very anxious with many medical procedures, esp. podiatry, ophthalmology, optic, and diagnostic studies. She usually requires physical supports and pre-sedation medication when attending these appointments. Polk Center provides many services at the facility, including: 24 hr. nursing care, doctors on call at all times, physical therapy, occupational therapy, dieticians, dietary food services, maintenance crew, custodial staff, and recreational staff.

Polk Center offers many resources on grounds, which helps alleviate Faye's stress level of having to leave her home. She receives many of her podiatry and ophthalmology exams at Polk Center. There are numerous activities she can attend, in her building as well as on Polk Center grounds. They may include a picnic at one of the pavilions, picture bingo, movie night in the auditorium, talent shows, many different contests throughout the year, playing ball (or skating) in the gymnasium, Earth day celebrations, Relay for Life walk-a-thon, fall festival, Grove City college students coming to put on a show, different bands that come to Polk to put on concerts, bike riding (handicap friendly), going to the Canteen or Our Place (two places at Polk Center where residents can enjoy food, drinks, and socialization), church services (for any denomination: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah Witness, etc.), hay rides, arts and crafts, a miniature golf course, and numerous other activities. There are also several sensory rooms available to the residents for sensory stimulation and/or calming.

She attends a week vacation at Pines Camp, located on Polk Center grounds. There, her and her peers enjoy camp fires, s'mores, fishing, or just listening to nature. Pines Camp has a full kitchen where staff provides home cooked meals provided by dietary. Polk Center even has a pool for her to go swimming if she chooses. The Polk Center pool has a floor that raises and lowers to accommodate any handicap. Many families and organizations in the community, outside of Polk Center, also utilize this pool.

She also attends off ground activities with her familiar peers and staff. They go out shopping, restaurant outings, out to see movies, sporting events, plays, concerts, fishing, picnics, fireworks, parades (Polk Center has their own float each year), VARHA (Venango Area Riding for the Handicapped Association-horse back riding), and to the Kraynak's store in Hermitage, PA to shop and view their magnificent Easter and Christmas display.

Faye also has a work program at the ceramics shop at Polk Center. She has worked there for many years and loves her job! There are many work programs at Polk Center, including the ceramic shop, the cement shop, the car wash, the greenhouse, as well as work in the canteen, dietary, document shredding, and many others. Faye wouldn't have this type of job if she lived in a community setting! Polk Center also has work programs in the community as well.

Since Polk Center is a teaching facility, there are also other programs to accommodate each resident. Some are geared toward basic activities of daily living, such as emptying their silverware into a container using hand over hand guidance. Others may include laundry programs, cooking programs, and money handling. Each living area at Polk Center has a living room with a television, radio, couches, recliners, lamps, end tables, kitchen area, bathroom areas which provides privacy and often times whirlpool tubs with lift chairs, a supply area, and a fully stocked dispensary for the residents in each area. Most have their own bedroom area. Each living area is decorated based on residents likes to provide décor for a home setting.

I have been an active family member in Faye's life my entire life. I take Faye home for the holidays, out to events, and sometimes just visit Faye at Polk. Faye loves coming to my home for visits. I could give you pages of memories of her and I baking cookies, going out for ice cream, or countless other activities. However, there is one consistency I will mention. That is, whenever we leave Polk Center, it doesn't take long before Faye is asking when I'm taking her back home to her cottage and showing signs of anxiety. That cottage is her home! That is where all her belongings and familiarities are. That is where her friends are. Polk Center is not an institution! It is a community within a community. Polk Center resides within Polk Borough. It is not secluded! Many individuals have left Polk Center to enter into the

community setting. Some have done great, and I am so happy for them. I truly am. However, others have not done so well leaving Polk Center. Many who have left did not survive, and it saddens me. One size does not fit all! The residents and staff are family to each other. All of the neighbors and businesses surrounding Polk Center love and care about the residents.

After a few hours of having Faye at my home, Faye is ready to go back to her cottage. Polk Center is her home! Taking her away from her home would be extremely detrimental to her, and I fear that she would not survive the transitional trauma of moving her anywhere! Closing Polk Center as well as other state centers will be a death sentence to many! It is our job, our duty, to be their voice, to stand up for their civil rights and their welfare! Please stand with us and fight to keep these centers open!