

October 17, 2019

To: Human Service and Health Committee

From: Rev. Jane Smith Wesson

RE: HB 1918

On behalf of my sister, Christina (Chrissy) Smith, who is a resident at the Polk Center and is unable to speak for herself, I am writing in regard to the potential closing of the Polk and White Haven Centers. Chrissy came to Polk in 1971 when she was 11 years old and is now 59. She is profoundly intellectually disabled. Polk is really the only place that she knows and is comfortable with. To even attempt to move her would be a traumatic experience for her as it would totally confuse her and disrupt any sense of comfort that she has. Polk is her home. The staff have become her family as our parents, long time residents of Clearfield County, are both deceased and my other sister and I both now live in Florida and are only able to come up to see her 1-2 times per year. She has had the best quality of life that anyone with her profound disability could have and I don't believe any community group home could meet all her physical and behavioral challenges. Otherwise, we would have sought community placement years ago.

Chrissy is diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Impulsive Control Disorder and Cerebral Palsy. Symptoms include self injurious behavior which is defined as: hitting her head on her own knee or other available surfaces and grabbing staff member's hands to hit her head with their hand. She has severe contractions of her legs and feet and is therefore non ambulatory and needs to be propelled by staff in a Broda chair. She needs to be transferred by 2 people or by using a mechanical lift. She is non verbal, unable to feed herself, bathe herself, make decisions, and go to the bathroom on her own. She requires 24 hour awake staff supervision due to dependency and safety. She is repositioned every two hours even through the night to prevent bed sores.

We have been so pleased with the personal care Christina receives and the activities she enjoys on a regular basis at Polk and in the community. Her favorites are going to the pool on a weekly basis, attending a weekly horse program off site where she rides in a cart behind a horse, and going to concerts. The Polk center has themed dances where Christina dresses up and likes to listen to the music. She is taken out into the community to go out to dinner and shopping. The staff writes letters for Christina and take pictures to send to the family. Christina does not appear to like noise and commotion and will seek quiet areas in her cottage such as the screened in porch or the sensory room where she can sit under fiber optic lights that she finds soothing.

I strongly encourage you to consider these very special people at the Polk and White Haven Centers and their special needs. Unless you can guarantee that Christina and the other residents will have the same quality of life and care that they have at these Centers, then it would be a mistake to have them moved to another environment that is not capable of meeting their needs. Please reconsider the action that is about to be taken concerning the closure of the Polk and White Haven Centers and consider House Bill 1918. Chrissy is depending on you.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jane Smith Wesson

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