

TO: PA House Committees on Health and Human Services.

Hello. I am Tom Kashatus, President of the White Haven Center Relatives & Friends Association – the family organization of White Haven Center (WHC). Thank you for this opportunity to come before you to express my opinion on the closure of our state centers.

Over the past 40 years that our daughter has been a resident of White Haven Center. Some advocacies - I'll call them "The Coalition" – have waged an effort to remove our residents from their home (WHC) a number of times - some by choice and some by a forced decision. They have almost achieved their goals – except one, and that is to close all state centers as a matter of a philosophy that was born out of the loins of the liberal leadership of the Temple University Institute on Disabilities.

Over the years our state center facilities have come a long way to excel in professionalism, care, and services to those who suffer from intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. Today, the residents who are there, they and their guardians and substitute decision makers, choose to live on a campus-like community with a lifestyle where all their required services are met for a quality of life that they choose and deserve. The "Olmstead Decision" actually gave "self-advocates" a choice as to where they wanted to live. Sadly, "Olmstead" also gave states some latitude here when making policy. The policy established in Pennsylvania is to push all those seeking residential services into the community or private facilities. Families are not given the opportunity to even tour a state facility. In the meantime, the waiting list for residential emergency services that are offered at our state centers continues to grow for the citizens of PA seeking those services - while empty certified beds at state centers total over 940.

Today, we come to do battle for the lives of our loved ones – and those on the waiting list.

First, know your foe ~~enemy~~ – the "Coalition," (1) Temple University Institute on Disabilities, (2) The ARC of PA, (3) ACHIEVA, (4) Disability Rights of PA, (5) The Waiting List Campaign, (6) Speaking for Ourselves, (7) Self Advocates United as 1, (8) Vision for Equality, (9) NEPA Inclusive, just to name a few.

Secondly, the "closed door" policy initiated by ODP is not working. The waiting list for residential services keeps on growing and growing. As we leave here today, the answer is simple – just open the doors to our treasured state centers and let people make their own informed choices for the services that they need.

And, Open the Doors!! Open the Doors!! Just, Open the Damn Doors!! – AOB

eliminate the waiting list