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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
HARRISBURG

DEPT. OF STATE  
OFFICE

THE GOVERNOR

February 12, 2020

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE OF THE  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Pursuant to Article IV, Section 15 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, I am returning herewith, without my approval, Senate Bill 906, Printer's Number 1447.

All people deserve the opportunity to live among their family and peers in integrated, supportive homes. Quality home and community-based care should be the priority for the individuals we serve.

Community care results in better outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities should be offered an everyday life as fully integrated members of our communities. My goal is to serve more individuals in the community, reduce reliance on institutional care, and improve access to home and community-based services.

This legislation does not promote this investment and transition to community-based care for individuals with a disability. Instead, this legislation continues the reliance on institutionalization and is a barrier to community living.

Specifically, this legislation is in response to the recent announcement of the closures of two state-operated centers: Polk State Center and White Haven State Center. These centers are large institutions that are costly to maintain and do not promote community living. As individuals have transitioned to the community, the need for state-operated centers has declined. It should be acknowledged that closures of state centers have always been controversial. The process that the Department of Human Services has followed for state center closure announcements was established to provide for the planful transition of residents and staff and to honor agreements with the employee unions. The department has followed this announcement procedure for the last two decades. The Department fully understands the gravity of the decision to close a center and has extensive procedures in place for such closures.

As previously announced, my administration will continue to work with residents, their families and the employees of the state centers to provide a smooth and safe transition over the next few years. No resident will leave these state-operated centers without a destination of the resident's and the family's choosing, including the option to remain in a state center setting. Further, no resident will leave without a fully developed individualized plan for the physical, emotional, developmental, social and mental health needs of the resident.

The debate around this closure has been polarizing. I look forward to the parties coming together and shifting our focus to ensuring a thoughtful and successful transition for each resident and each employee.

For the reasons set forth above, I must withhold my signature from Senate Bill 906, Printer's Number 1447.

Sincerely,

  
Tom Wolf  
Governor