

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council Position on Consolidation and Closure of Developmental Centers

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Position Statement

Louisiana's reliance on segregated developmental centers for residential services to people with disabilities is excessive, costly, unnecessary and fundamentally unfair. Louisiana should develop and implement a plan to consolidate and close its remaining developmental centers, and reallocate the state's resources from a reliance on institutional services to support of adequate, high quality community-based options for individualized supports and services.

Discussion

All people, regardless of the severity of their disability, have a right to live in their own homes in the community. The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council supports the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all facets of community life - where they live, learn, work, play and worship - so they are free to experience life and pursue happiness and meaningful relationships. Segregation in developmental centers deprives individuals of the benefits and freedoms afforded by participating in community life. It prevents countless reciprocal and loving relationships and robs Louisiana communities of the gifts and talents of thousands of our citizens.

"The goals of the Nation properly include a goal of providing individuals with developmental disabilities with the information, skills, opportunities, and support to make informed choices and decisions about their lives; live in homes and communities in which such individuals can exercise their full rights and responsibilities as citizens; and achieve full integration and inclusion in society, in an individualized manner, consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities of each individual." The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (P.L.106-402)

Developmental centers, by their very nature, do not allow people with disabilities the freedom of choice to live where they wish. These institutions are no longer the contemporary approach for the way individuals with disabilities seek to live and receive treatment and supports. Moving public funding from developmental centers to community supports and services that people with disabilities want and deserve will turn the restricted exercise of rights into the realization of freedom.

Louisiana's over reliance on institutional services is a barrier to freedom of choice for people with disabilities; and by supporting outdated and costly segregated developmental centers, the state does not allow the full exercise of freedom, not only to the residents of the developmental centers but also to the more than 9,000 individuals waiting for supports from Home and Community Based Waivers.

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Deinstitutionalization has occurred throughout the United States for over four decades. While Louisiana has been behind the times, recent shifts in policy will result in Louisiana becoming more aligned with the rest of the nation by successfully reducing its number of developmental centers from nine in 2005 to three in 2011. It is time for Louisiana to take the next step and discontinue completely this outdated and costly practice. Institutionalization is not a necessary or required method of delivering needed services – even for those individuals with the highest level of need. People with the most challenging needs can and do live successfully in their own homes in Louisiana and all over the country with appropriate, individualized supports. Research has proven that individuals grow and thrive as members of their community and have a better quality of life than in congregate settings.¹ Currently, twelve states (AK, HI, IN, KY, ME, MN, NH, NM, OR, RI, VT, WV) and the District of Columbia have found public institutions unnecessary in providing services and supports to people with disabilities. The continued practice of segregation in the face of this compelling evidence is inexcusable.

Additionally, closing developmental centers would free up resources to serve more people in need. Cost benefits would be realized with institutional closures in this state. In Louisiana the average annual cost of serving an individual in a developmental center is more than three times the average cost for a New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) slot. Recent cost comparisons of community and institutional services refute claims that institutions offer “economies of scale” or that the centralization of services at institutions is more cost-effective.² Louisiana must return its citizens with disabilities to their home communities where their lives can be enriched and they can enrich the lives of others. The consultants’ report, *Program and Policy Review of Long Term Care in Louisiana* states, “downsizing inevitably pushes per person costs upward” and cites North Carolina as an example of a state whose costs have risen while they have downsized, but not closed, their developmental centers. It further states, “the amount of resources that could be redeployed to the community has been minimal. As a consequence, we recommend that Louisiana confront facility closure sooner rather than later in order to maximize the amount of funds that can be shifted to community services.”³

The state’s efforts to expand community services to meet the needs of the more than 9,000 individuals waiting for waiver services have been thwarted by maintaining costly institutions. This lack of community services has also forced families to institutionalize family members. It is time for the state of Louisiana to exercise leadership and chart a new course for services and supports for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

It is time for Louisiana to close, not downsize, its developmental centers.

The Developmental Disabilities Council urgently recommends that Louisiana:

- 1) Provide adequate funding and build capacity for high quality individualized supports and services in the community for all people with developmental disabilities.

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- 2) Continue to utilize Resource Allocation across all settings, including in small and large private and public ICFs-DD, to fairly distribute resources by allocating services according to need.
- 3) Halt admissions into state developmental centers and improve the use of alternative safety nets by
 - a) expanding the criteria for and the number of emergency waiver slots available,
 - b) implementing a comprehensive crisis prevention and intervention system for individuals in the community including:
 - proactive preventive services, and
 - coordinated 24-hour crisis response services (including telephone hotline, mobile response teams, in-home crisis services, licensed short-term crisis residential services [private], and crisis response plans for hospitals and other general health care providers).
- 4) Develop and implement a plan to consolidate and close Louisiana's remaining developmental centers.
- 5) Redirect resources in the developmental disability service system utilizing cost savings from Resource Allocation and the consolidation, closure, and sale of developmental centers to support individuals on the waiver waiting list and those living in the community.

References:

- ¹ Kozma, A., Mansell, J., Beadle-Brown, J., (2009). *Outcomes in Different Residential Settings for People with Intellectual Disability: A Systematic Review*. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 114, 193 – 222.
- ² Taylor, S. J. (2003). *The Editor's Perspective on Institutional and Community Costs*. *Mental Retardation*, 41,125-126.
- ³ Milne, D., Smith, G., Holton, E., & Plovka, L. (2004). *Program and Policy Review of Long-Term Care in Louisiana*. A Report developed for the State of Louisiana, Interagency Team.