



**THE MASSACHUSETTS
COALITION OF FAMILIES And
ADVOCATES**

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March 11, 2009

Re: Testimony for Ways & Means Public Hearing on FY10 Budget

My name is David J. Hart. I speak today as President of COFAR, the Coalition of Families and Advocates, a 25-year-old statewide organization of people and family groups caring for those with Developmental Disabilities in all settings. COFAR thanks you for soliciting testimony from all stakeholders.

On Friday afternoon, December 12, 2008 Governor Patrick announced a plan to close four developmental centers for the mentally retarded over four years. The governor's plan requires an estimated \$45 million in new spending over the next four years, before realizing a projected \$80 million savings at the end of the plan.

In the governor's budget before you, you will see a \$13 million cut to the facilities line item, [5930-1000](#), which is presented to you as immediate savings of closing the Fernald Center in FY10. So where are the costs? If DDS is allowed to proceed with the Governor's plan, the aging, fragile, residents of Fernald will exercise their legal right to "equal or better" treatment by transferring to another developmental center or state operated group home. However, the DDS budget before you merges the increased operating costs of state-operated group homes and the lower-level treatment at private-provider group homes into one giant line item, [5920-2000](#), budgeted at \$852,653,065, (Eight hundred fifty-two million, six hundred fifty three thousand, sixty-five dollars). In previous years, the House and Senate have re-divided this line into three line items for state-operated group homes; community-residential, which are contract provider group homes; and funds to satisfy the requirements of the Rolland Nursing Home case.

I urge you to see where the \$13,000,000 savings turns into increased expenditures, and to maintain a historic firewall against privatizing state-operated group homes. The state-operated group homes and developmental centers are not only where the most vulnerable people served by the Commonwealth are housed and treated – they are also the safety net for the community residential system. In addition, more than 10,000 people with disabilities rely on facility-based services, such as, dental care, medical care, swimming

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pools, and employment programs, all of which will have to be relocated or abandoned under the governor's plan. COFAR is asking you to add these hidden costs and human costs to the shifted costs, and to insert language preventing DDS from closing any developmental centers until they produce a detailed and honest accounting.

COFAR also asks you to take a look at the capital budgets. DDS recently requested proposals to build 21 new group homes, primarily to accommodate people displaced from developmental centers. The costs are concealed by using the state's bonding power to finance private construction, with 20-year leases to DDS. While millions of families live in fear of foreclosure, the Governor of Massachusetts is planning to evict hundreds of people with developmental disabilities, then use the power of state government to steer cheap financing and guaranteed leases to private companies to build new housing for them. At the end of twenty years, having paid these outrageous leases, the taxpayers of Massachusetts will own nothing.

In response to, the Orwellian rhetoric of the Governor's massive eviction announcement that it was a widening of "community choice" a guardian at a recent meeting at the Templeton Developmental Center attended by Commissioner Howe, questioned the meaning of the words "institution" and "community". She stated, "My brother cannot cross the street because he does not look. He cannot speak to be understood unless you know him very well. At Templeton he is in a neighborhood of people like himself, with veteran staff who do understand him, and he can make his own plans of where he will go each day. He would be more institutionalized in a group home than he is at Templeton, because he would not be able to go anywhere without a staff member for his safety, which he hates. When there isn't a spare staff member to go with him, he will be parked in front of a TV set."

In conclusion, COFAR requests 3 things:

Stop the closure of the 4 Development Centers

DDS must provide a full and detailed accounting of their department

Breakup the community line item [5920-2000](#) into 3 separate line items.

Thank you, for the opportunity to provide testimony.

David J. Hart
President

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