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There is a place in Hawaii called "*Puuhonua o Honaunau*," which historically was a place of refuge for those who transgressed the law and otherwise faced certain death. Safe arrival there meant you were safe from your pursuers—for good! As the arrival of Europeans on Hawaiian shores brought many deleterious changes to the customs of the native peoples, this was also the beginning of the end of the "Kapu" system of laws and not the least of which, the "Place of Refuge," fell victim to as well. It took a sea voyage half-way around the world and a number of years to enact this "sea-change" to the native Hawaiian people. Their lives would never be the same forever.

Fast forward two hundred and thirty-plus years to the Sonoma Developmental Center...where a mere stroke of a legislative pen has set in motion an equivalent destructive measure. In this case, the home of nearly 400 developmentally disabled residents is scheduled for the wrecking-ball and the relative centralizing of services for these unfortunate souls is poised to be scattered to the wind as well.

My brother, Larry Hall, is a resident in Bemis Unit. He's lived there since 1988 and before that a number of years at the former Agnews State Hospital. He was unable to live at home anymore once he became big enough to wreak physical harm to his surroundings and to his family members. He has since survived a misplaced attempt to house him in a community setting which was admittedly an "unmitigated disaster"--according to those who are professionally associated with him at the SDC. The reasons for this were not delineated to me. Larry, like most of the other residents, remains there simply because community placement did not work out for them and for a myriad of reasons. The SDC is truly a "place of refuge" to all these residents in view of the risks of physical harm they (and others) would face should they be placed in a community setting. This has been proven time and time again. Just a few weeks ago, some of my family members witnessed the father of a fellow male Bemis resident fall victim to a neck-choking and a beating from that same son. This drove the point home beyond words (and legislative fiat) that these residents are severely "at-risk" in any but the most closely monitored setting (as are those who unwittingly find themselves on the wrong end of a choke-hold).

I cannot see for the life of me any positive aspect to this proposed (certain) closure of SDC. The seemingly wanton disregard for these residents is clearly exemplified by the "wishful thinking" associated with disinterested legislative parties and the move to "cut expenditures" and to "privatize" necessary services and housing for those least able to manage on their own. At home, I frequently look out my front window and watch daily the "homeless crazies" who scream at the sky or punch imaginary predators as they walk or bicycle oblivious to traffic lights or cars. These destitute troubled souls are literally, "accidents waiting to happen." We all know that the funding for the mentally-ill "disappeared" starting in the 80's in California

and that many of these unfortunates have had to scramble for survival outside in urban jungles. They now, unfortunately, comprise a sizable percentage of the homeless population. This would **not** be an option for our SDC residents.

Closure of the Sonoma Developmental Center would certainly be the first step in a nightmarish downward spiral for those whose “place of refuge” has been obliterated. I cannot envision any positive outcome of such a shortsighted and destructive course of action—tantamount to culpable homicide—if you will. Executioners are still plainly identified even if they wear three-piece suits and ties (or power-skirts) and wield only fountain pens. Their willing enablers who follow the legal statutes and facilitate this “pogrom” are similarly culpable in any just and moral society.

I, for one, deplore this “sea-change” of “murder by decree.”

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