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Dear Legislature,

I am sister and co-conservator for my Kimberly Loustalot.

I strongly oppose the decision to close Sonoma Developmental Center, (SDC). I am very disappointed in the legislature and Governor Brown's decision to close the three remaining Developmental Centers. He is not the same person he was the first time around when I worked for DDS in Sacramento. He was a go getter with great ideas. Yes, very disappointed. This brings us back in time to when the Mental Health Facilities and Programs were closed. We now have a homeless problem with those individuals. This approach did not work then and this will not work now.

**The closure puts my sister and the other residents at risk.**

**I recommend that SDC be transformed for the current residents rather than closure.**

Our story is not that different than the others that live at Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC), with my sister Kim. She has been a resident of the SDC since 1966, and it is the only real home she knows. This is her (their) community. In 1985 my mother and grandfather contributed approximately \$10,000, as did several other families as part of a pilot program called DeAnza House with MARC of Marin. Five years later in 1990, the program failed Kimberley. The original staff was from Sonoma Developmental Center. The funding changed and this constraint led to untrained staff being hired at minimum wage. The result of which Kim's developmental disabilities and bipolar behavior could not be controlled, and a staff member called the local police. My sister was handcuffed and taken to jail, and my mother was called that her daughter was no longer at DeAnza House. My Mother (now 92 years old) found Kim in a 4-point restraint and heavily medicated at the Crisis Center at Ross Hospital where Kim was brought as a last resort, no other place. After a few weeks at the Ross Hospital my sister was returned to the Sonoma Developmental Center, where she has lived since 1990. This was no easy task. I have letters my mother wrote to the then Director of Developmental Service. Never in all of her life at SDC was her behavior as such that she has been treated in that manner.

**SDC is the only home she knows as is the same for her friends she lives with. This is their community. The staff there are well trained professionals with compassion and patience for the residents. This is the least restrictive and safest environment for those currently living at SCD, also, for many of those who have left.**

**The passing of this bill and Governor Brown's signing of this bill to close has taken away these residents right to choice for a least restrictive and safe home.** The proposed alternative of placing these individuals within community facilities does not address all of their needs for a successful, least restrictive lifestyle. We as individuals have the right to choose where we would like to live and how we would like to live. This choice has been taken away from these residents. They are human beings dealing with challenges from birth or illness or injury. It is our job as humans on this Earth to protect those who cannot protect themselves. This is a social injustice, we all are failing them in this situation.

**I challenge everyone to walk a day or even an hour in their shoes.** Go to Sonoma Developmental Center before making these decisions. I know from experience the people making many of these decisions have not ever stepped inside Sonoma Developmental Center, or any Developmental Center, or spent time with any residents. **There are not the facilities available with the same least restrictive and safe offerings as SDC elsewhere.** It would be less expensive to transform SDC to allow the residents to remain in their home.

I was discussing these issues with a friend who has a son with challenges and lives in a facility in the community. His son has many capabilities. I explained my sister's challenges which include drastic mood swings with aggression. At times she will run outside and yell F... you bitch and other rantings.. She has this freedom at SDC. She also can have a 1:1 when needed to keep her and others safe. My friend's response was "well it is clear she cannot live in a residential program like my son." No, she cannot as previously stated, she ended up hand cuffed and in a 4 point restraint, meaning tied to a chair or bed. That is not the least restrictive alternative. The "community facilities" become a prison.

**What will happen during the transition of these individuals? What happens to those being removed from the only home they have know for many years with many freedoms and friends.** Moving is a very stressful transition to make for a person without challenges. **Just imagine what will happen when they cannot go home again. It is not a matter of if they fail but when the community fails them.** What happens to them then? This decision puts these residents at risk for their safety. These individuals do not transition well. If they did we would not be here today.

**This is where the state must develop and continue to provide:**

- **We need a SDC site to provide medical, dental and behavioral support to the developmentally disabled (DD). Also we need to keep wheelchair repair there.**
- **This is key because these people are trained well in caring and understanding for our loved ones.**
- **We need housing for those who are not successful in community facilities. Because I do not want my sister or anyone else to go through what she did in the past. She has people who love and care for her at SDC..**

- **We want these services developed now! We need these to be developed now before there are problems and the kinks are worked out.**
- **We want our views and those of the Sonoma community and coalition to be heard and considered in making a plan for the future of SDC.**

There are options on the table that are currently not being spoken about such as transforming parts of SDC for local community use and still having the **current residents** live there. There is the possibility of building smaller homes for the **current residents** as part of this plan. To make this plan work it must include **the current population. In order for a transformation to really succeed we must work together and reopen admissions to SDC. The plans for this transformation need to be set in motion.**

I want everyone here to really think about the guy who sits out front of Malone with his stick tapping it to get your attention to talk to him. The guy who walks two blocks up to the road to watch the cars and wave. This same guy who also has his rock pile. Where will he find one? And my sister Kim who will sweetly greet you with “Hi how you. What’s you name” in her happy state. **These individuals have their daily rituals and routines.** They are able to receive equine therapy, swimming, cooking, outings to town, religious freedoms, great day programs and more. They are free to come and go. **What have these individuals done to deserve this at this point in their lives?** This is a poor trick to pull on them and their parents when they believed they were **safely** set for life. It is wrong for you at DDS and the Governor to use the “FUD Factor”(fear, uncertainty, and doubt) on these families.

We must all work together and protect these innocent lives. These “perfect” facilities are not there in reality. If there is some “perfect place” the funding will not always be there. These individuals deserve our trust, love and respect.

It seems we are just a special interest group with little following. We hear more about noise from leaf blowers than we do this social injustice. What are we investing in? When did sensibilities supersede in the welfare and well being of those who need it most?

**I challenge each of you to hear our pleas, their screams and fear each and every night when you close your eyes and everyday when you awake and look in the mirror. I want you to feel the pain we as friends, relatives and staff feel every day with this heart breaking situation.**

Yours sincerely,

**Renée Loustalot**