

I am writing to recommend that Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) not be closed, but rather that it be transformed into a center of excellence for the care of California's most vulnerable developmentally disabled people. While some developmentally disabled are successfully cared for in other settings, those who currently reside at SDC require the services provided there. Many people who currently live at Sonoma Developmental Center have already been placed elsewhere unsuccessfully and returned to SDC where they are thriving in spite of complex medical and/or behavioral problems. Some of these people have reportedly been deemed "inappropriate for community placement," based on unsuccessful attempts by them to live outside of SDC. There are likely others with similar needs living outside of Sonoma Developmental Center who might thrive if given the opportunity to live at SDC and/or receive services available at SDC. But, since admission to SDC is closed and the services offered there are unavailable to those who live outside of SDC, severely disabled people are denied vital resources offered at Sonoma Developmental Center.

As part of the transformation of Sonoma Developmental Center, we must reopen admissions to SDC. Let's do what needs to be done to transform SDC into the highest quality facility possible. This has never been an institution that is static and unchanging. Over the past forty years, I have witnessed relentless efforts at SDC to improve the quality of care provided for those who live there. As a high school student volunteering there beginning in 1971 I was introduced to large wards filled with severely disabled people who slept in long rows of beds in halls. Now, with the passage of time and improved understanding of the needs of developmentally disabled people, those who live at SDC live in congregate living settings that resemble homes and receive individualized care based on their needs.

We must continue to offer all of the services currently available at Sonoma Developmental Center that meet the needs of those who live there. Those who live at SDC require professionals who know how to care for the most severely developmentally disabled. These professionals include doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, registered nurses, psychiatric technicians, social workers, special education teachers, physical therapists, dietitians, speech therapists, occupational therapists, music therapists, chaplains, dentists, adaptive equipment specialists, and more. As employees of the state of California and the Department of Developmental Services, these professionals provide the highest quality specialized care available and they do so with great continuity, sometimes caring for the same individuals for decades. Those who live at Sonoma Developmental Center thrive on the continuity of their caregivers, just as members of a family thrive on the continuity of love and care given to each member of a family. I encourage you to listen to the stories of family members whose loved ones live at SDC to understand the great importance of continuity in the lives of those who live there.

The care of individuals who cannot care for themselves is our moral responsibility. Californians must assure that such vulnerable individuals whether they live in developmental centers or not, are protected in perpetuity and provided

with the professional care they require. This will always be our responsibility. Sonoma Developmental Center is the perfect location for such a center as it possesses the environment, infrastructure, and personnel needed to care for our most vulnerable. I urge all who are attempting to close Sonoma Developmental Center to join in the community efforts underway here in Sonoma Valley to transform the center into the place of excellence it is meant to be.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mari S. Emmons