

Governor Brown's approved budget calls for the closure (transformation is the families' preferred term) of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC), where approximately 400 of the most vulnerable Californians live.

The administration says it is committed to transparency, collaboration and a person-centered thoughtful and careful planning process. The facts say the opposite.

The chief purpose of this letter is to inform you about the wrongful refusal of the Brown administration's to disclose basic safety and general health care information and records regarding the effects on people with developmentally disabilities of past developmental center closures. This information and these records are vital for the welfare of SDC residents and the Governor's closure/ transformation plan, which must be submitted to the legislature by October 1, 2015. A second purpose of this letter is to protest the failure of the Brown administration to honor its pledge to collaborate with families, unions, and area residents in setting priorities and making plans for the ultimate transformation of SDC.

I am writing on behalf of my sister, Susan Farrell, a resident at Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) since 1958. Susan has an IQ of 17, has no speech, except to echo a few words without context, cerebral palsy, a seizure disorder, major anxiety, and severe autism, among many challenges. I am also writing on behalf of several hundred other residents and their families, who oppose the planned closure of SDC. I am not representing other residents and I am not an officer of the Parents' Hospital Association. I am the retired city attorney of Santa Rosa and knowledgeable about the California Public Records Act and collaboration by local government, which often uses skilled facilitators to support collaborative efforts to seek consensus regarding highly controversial policies or program changes that will deeply affect the public.

Although I do not support the closure, I am not writing to challenge the Governor's analysis of the budget consequences of closure. However, based on the experience of families who have experienced developmental center closures elsewhere in California, we believe that the safety, care and well-being of our loved ones is, with few exceptions, jeopardized by the closure of the Sonoma Developmental Center. Our sisters and children are being evicted, against their wishes, from their homes and community. They will no longer benefit from the healing power of the setting of SDC, one of the chosen spots of all the earth, as far as nature is concerned. (Jack London chose this very spot to build his famed Wolf House, after traveling the world.) Residents will lose their community of friends, including "roommates" they have lived for decades, as well as highly qualified and trained, dedicated and long term staff. Most of the staff where my sister lives at SDC have cared for her for 10-25 years.

Our loved ones are among the most vulnerable people in California. At SDC, the state has provided very professional care (We acknowledge the exceptions.) and services in a precious setting for 57 of my sister's 61 years. Here is one of a host of examples of why this is a critical health and safety issue. Susan's primary care physician at SDC could not do an annual physical exam of her for his first fifteen years on staff at SDC. Susan is tactilely defensive. Now, after 16 years, Dr. Russell can do a more normal physical exam and assess through palpation whether there are any areas of concern for more sophisticated testing. This is one of hundreds of examples of why families are fighting for creation of a medical and dental clinic for people with developmental disabilities onsite at SDC, concurrent with the closure/ transformation.

The Governor's closure/ transformation decision will compel us to accept care providers, outside SDC, who receive low wages and are less qualified and trained, and turn over frequently compared to SDC staff. Most of the residents' parents and siblings are elderly. Most of the fragile SDC residents do not adapt well to any change and they will not be able to voice what is lacking, once they are forced from their home. Many of the residents are supported by breathing and/ or feeding tubes. Many have a dual diagnosis of a developmental disability and mental illness. Many have not fared well in the past in a board facility. They depend on family and the media to bring to light the actions of the cold bureaucracy that is denying access to the information and records that will enable the State and families to assure that the least possible harm results from the closure/ transformation.

Governor's Cover-Up

Because of the administration's stonewalling, horror stories about past DC closures and unsafe and abusive care experienced outside SDC families have requested (and received no response) :

1. Mortality reviews after other DC closures;
2. Post-closure hospitalizations, ER visits, and other basic medical and dental data, including wait times for services and access to preventive care;
3. Family satisfaction surveys, with access to results;
4. Crime victim data;
5. Pedestrian accident data;
6. Arrest and detention data;
7. Employee attrition data and pre-closure comparative analysis;
8. Program, services and housing stability;
9. Reports, notes of meetings, summaries and evaluations about lessons learned about past SC closures. Mistakes are alluded to; what did go wrong and what steps have been taken to reduce the risk of repetition of errors.

Since the Governor's administration refuses to work with PHA and other stakeholders to create assessments, collect data and evaluate and summarize the information, families infer that the truth is worse than our fears.

Bulldozing of Families in Spite of Pledge to Engage a Professional Expert in Collaboration

As Santa Rosa's retired city attorney, I have been involved in hundreds of hearings and meetings about controversial matters. I have seen attempts by staff to push items forward without collaboration and the resulting fireworks and setbacks. That should never happen when the stakes as high as they are here- the lives and safety of loved ones. What should have been done and could still be done going forward to October 1st, the date the closure/ transformation report is due?

First, there should have been a professional and independent facilitator, who was agreed upon by stakeholders. That person would have insisted on participation of all stakeholders in designing the meeting and agreeing on a reasonable time. PHA members are gathering for the first time since the closure announcement on July 11th to share information about options and next steps and to mourn the loss of the precious setting, staff and services at SDC. PHA requested that PHA families be permitted to meet before engaging with DDS. PHA recognizes the closure plan is due in October and sees no reason that completion of the plan would be jeopardized by a short delay in the initial informational meeting. Instead of working with all stakeholders in advance of this one and only initial roll-out, DDS proceeded unilaterally and in utter disregard of the legitimate interests of families, employees, and other stakeholders.

Here are excerpts from the DDS letter explaining why it would have been inconvenient for the bureaucracy to delay the informational meeting for the two to three weeks requested by PHA.

"The Department could not put off the meeting off for as long as was requested. The Department is working under short timelines to prepare a plan for the Legislature by October 2015....We will make concerted effort to keep members informed in a timely manner as a closure plan is developed and implemented."

This imperious communication is reflective of a 1950s view of how government serves the community. Collaboration is not about minimal legal compliance; it is about doing the right thing by allowing all of us with a stake in the outcome to have a meaningful role in contributing to the best plan possible for our vulnerable family members. Collaboration relies on respect, cooperation, and aims to assure that stakeholders all value the process, knowing that not everyone will agree with the outcomes. We have now lost the first and irretrievable opportunity to establish trust in a respectful, dignified and fair process.

But it was not too late to engage a highly skilled collaboration professional, agreed upon by stakeholders, to plan and oversee the meeting on July 18th. That did not happen, nor were stakeholders, such as families, unions, those who have been studying land use options granted a role in planning the meeting or outlining their issues and goals at the outset of the lengthy meeting. I realize that it was a public hearing. It was still an opportunity to attempt to reverse the harm caused by the meeting in June. Instead, on Saturday, July 18th, administration officials sat passively in the audience, while family after family expressed its grief, anger and fears. We are all capable of much better.

I met with senior administration officials in early July and received a pledge to work collaboratively going forward. Here is the commitment:

"Hi Brien,

DDS is willing to set up some meetings with Sonoma DC stakeholders that employ the type of facilitation you propose. To that end, DDS has contacted the Center for Collaborative Policy to see if they are available for this work. If we can secure their services, which I am hopeful we can, we will work with the Center and stakeholders to set up some meetings to facilitate greater collaboration for all the parties involved. "

In spite of this pledge, no collaboration has been initiated by the administration. And CCP, the firm of consultants that ably facilitated the May 2015 collaborative meeting hosted by the Sonoma Land Trust and Sonoma County Supervisor Susan Gorin has been and is ready to facilitate a meeting hosted by the state of California. Meanwhile, the administration has requested that all comments be submitted by September 1st in order to complete the closure/transformation report by October 1st. Time is passing quickly. And there is no dialogue or collaboration.

At my meeting with state officials, I was told that there is not a single public record that relates to or addresses lessons learned or mistakes made or the evaluation of other DC closures. The only explanation for this is a deliberate effort to keep any such record or note in a draft or attorney/ client document. This is wrong. We are entitled to know what went right what went wrong so that our loved ones are safe.

I have contacts with families and Southern California who have personal knowledge of the harm that resulted to people with severe disabilities there from poorly planned closures there. I also have contact information for SDC families, who have experienced abusive and inadequate services outside SDC in the past. I also have contact information for SDC union representatives and leaders of the Sonoma Land Trust, who seek to maintain services at SDC and protect the

precious habitats on the grounds. For more background information, you can check the website for the Sonoma Developmental Center Parents' Hospital association and the Sonoma Land Trust.

Last, I have contact information for the PHA president, who can answer questions about the goal of families to establish, concurrently with the closure of SDC a medical, dental and crisis center at SDC in order to assure ongoing high quality care. Recent stories have confirmed that Medi-Cal is overwhelmed. Many of our loved ones are at great risk to die, if care is not provided by the specialists at SDC, who have learned over the years precisely how to care for those unable to communicate verbally anything about their medical or dental history or needs.

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