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Assembly California Legislature



BILL DODD
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, FOURTH DISTRICT

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE
BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS
RULES
TRANSPORTATION
WATER, PARKS AND WILDLIFE

May 19, 2015

The Honorable Mark Leno
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
State Capitol, Room 5100

The Honorable Shirley Weber
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026

RE: Proposed Closure of Sonoma Developmental Center in State Budget

Dear Chairpersons Leno and Weber:

As the state legislators representing Sonoma County and the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC), we are opposed to the proposal in the Governor's May Budget Revise calling for the closure of the developmental center by the end of 2018. The proposal also calls for trailer bill language requiring DDS to provide the legislature with a closure plan by October 1, 2015, which is far too short a period of time to have the meaningful engagement needed to develop an adequate plan. **We ask that the Senate and Assembly Budget Committees consider a more reasonable timeline to allow better planning to ensure patient health and safety, community preparedness, and the livelihoods of employees and their families.**

SDC is home to more than 400 residents and a place of employment for over 1,200 dedicated employees. It is critical that when the closure of this facility is considered, the health and well-being of the residents, many of whom have called SDC home for many decades, are given the respectful consideration they deserve.

Community leaders and stakeholders believe the Administration's proposal is a haphazard plan to shut the doors of the SDC without regard to patient health and safety. A longer and more thoughtful approach for transitioning residents to other settings is vital. SDC patients are some of the neediest and most medically fragile people in our state. Three years is too short of a timeframe to address the complex needs of these residents when you consider the significant gap in services that exists between those offered at the SDC and those currently available in the community. The other developmental centers have been given until 2021 to transition their residents to community settings, while SDC has been singled out for an inappropriately short timeline for closure.

Further, the proposed appropriation of \$49.3 million for transitioning residents is only slated to provide enough space for approximately half of the SDC's population, and those resources will take several years to develop. Many of the remaining residents have significant medical or behavioral issues that make developing adequate community resources difficult and time intensive. No similar developmental center has been closed in such a short timeframe.



The closures of Agnews and Lanterman Developmental Centers took 5 years (2004-05 to 2008-09) and 6 years (2009-10 to 2014-15) respectively. The closures of those developmental centers also had the benefit of being able to transfer the most fragile residents to other developmental centers – including Sonoma Developmental Center – and to return to another developmental center if their community placements proved inadequate to meet the resident’s needs. The proposed closure of the three remaining DCs over 6 years is only about half of the 11 years it took to close both Agnews and Lanterman DCs, one at a time. Unlike other developmental centers that have closed, SDC is in a more rural and suburban region, that has very little excess housing stock, making a three-year timeline even more specious and unreasonable.

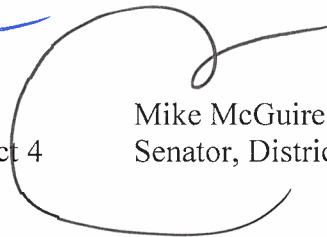
The Department is being tasked with closing two other developmental centers simultaneously. This will put untenable demands on Department resources, hampering its ability to pay proper attention for a successful transition. There is also significant work that needs to be done to ensure that employees and their families are treated fairly and given the opportunity to succeed, while providing their services to our state’s neediest residents. It’s critical that the Legislature have the time to review the Department’s progress and provide needed direction and resources to ensure the needs of the residents, employees, and the land, which serves as a vital wildlife corridor, are all appropriately addressed.

The SDC Coalition, which includes representatives of our state and federal delegations, the Parent Hospital Association, employee representatives, land conservation groups, and members of the Sonoma Valley community, has been working on a planning process for the transformation of the SDC and will continue to do so. We respectfully ask that the proposed expedited closure of SDC by 2018 be stricken from the budget, so that all developmental centers can be allowed to close in a more appropriate manner and on a more reasonable timeline. We also ask that any closure plans be completed by when the legislature is convened next year, rather than a rushed proposal provided in October.

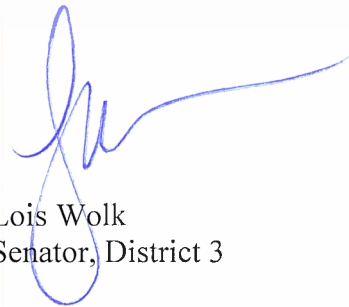
Sincerely,



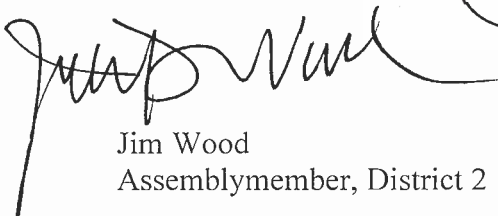
Bill Dodd
Assemblymember, District 4



Mike McGuire
Senator, District 2



Lois Wolk
Senator, District 3



Jim Wood
Assemblymember, District 2

cc: Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins
Senate President Pro Tem Kevin De León
Nancy McFadden, Executive Secretary
Members, Assembly Budget Committee
Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee