

An Open Letter to Governor Jerry Brown

On July 18, the **Department of Developmental Services** held a hearing in Sonoma regarding your decision to close the **Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC)**. Over 200 parents, representatives, and residents participated. Currently over 400 severely handicapped residents reside at the SDC.

The legislative plan, based on your budget recommendation, is to close SDC in three years. The clients are children and siblings of Californians who are to be re-distributed to “community homes” under the authority of Regional Centers. Supposedly this will save the State of California \$41 million per year in an education budget of \$76.6 billion.

The public has little understanding of residents’ disabilities. They require round the clock service. Unless a person visits the SDC and sees the necessary care provided the “clients,” one will remain ignorant of their needs. Privacy laws and no visitors or photo rules further hide the population from the public.

This past week President Barack Obama personally visited a Federal prison. I believe that you, Governor Brown, should follow the President’s lead and visit the Sonoma Developmental Center! You will see what services and care are provided to more than 400 clients. Then you may judge the impact of your policies on these human beings.

Governor, please read below the pleas and comments of participants at yesterday’s hearing. This is not a transcript. Comments are taken from notes. Any error of omission or commission is mine. DDS will publish a transcript with names redacted within a week. The names of client conservators are not shown, but their relationship is identified.

Senator Mike Maguire, District 2 – The normal timeline for closure of a Center is five years, not 3 years.... On August 20 there will be a Town Hall meeting independent of DDS. We will provide budget data and other information related to the closure. Assemblyman Bill Dodd agreed.

Susan Gorin, County Supervisor, 1st. District – Sen. Noreen Evans first alerted people about a threat to SDC. A Coalition of six county agencies, the *Sonoma Land Trust, and Ecology Center* ask that any closure be based on the welfare of the residents..., 24/7 care for residents must be insured before change..., Regional Centers must provide only approved and monitored housing..., Identify transitional housing for residents before anyone is moved..., the County wishes to see residents’ homes established for the long term..., The SDC site with its incredible value and beauty must be preserved..., The Coalition and community need to be unified on issues including protection of water, property, and wells...

Neil Fishman, Sonoma Land Trust – The bottom line..., if SDC were to sell “there will be hell.” If closed, the State should use the property, any plans for future use need to be established before the clients leave, keep them on site until there is a plan. The SDC should be used for medical research facilities, recreation, and whatever the plan, it should be a holistic approach.

Relative – Workers helped provide a healthy life and relatively safe environment. DDS has not collaborated with families, they have “patted us on the head” and told us to go our way. We have always felt isolated from DDS.

Sonoma Ecology Center - SDC is the last wildlife corridor across the Valley..., SDC is a place where clients therapeutically commune with nature, that won't be available in homes..., we challenge the State to work with us, not push us....

Father – My son is in his 30's..., clients need continuity. They have lovable people around them..., We never have a negative thought about the SDC, don't change that....

Sister – Clients suffer from challenges by birth, not choice! Sacramento decision makers have never stepped inside SDC. They can't live in a residential setting, they act out! We want a safety net – medical, dental, and caring..., Shame on the Gov. and DDS for closing! Contact the Governor and your legislators.

Signed,

Tom Martin, *Sonoma County Gazette*