

July 24, 2015

Dear Legislators,

My name is Joan Nolan and I am the sister and co-conservator of Gale Buckley who is a resident of Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). Gale is 61 years old, and has been diagnosed with profound mental retardation and Autism, and has received excellent care at SDC for the past 53 years. I am writing to you because Gale cannot speak for herself and I am concerned about Gale's well-being if the Sonoma Developmental Center closes completely. SDC is home to Gale and approximately 400 other residents. **SDC** is not just a **home** to these people, it is there **community**. They have staff that are specially trained and know each resident and what their individual needs are. I have witnessed the kindness and patience that is provided to my sister and others who are familiar with their individual needs. The staff is specially trained and knows how to interact with the residents. There is no community-based care home that can provide my sister with the same specialized level of care that she has received by the highly trained, professional staff at SDC.

I have seen SDC downsize over the years as residents are placed in "community" based facilities. Those that remain, including my sister, are still there because they need the most help and are the most vulnerable members of our society! It is cruel to throw them out of their homes and take away their safety net that has kept them healthy and happy for so many years. It saddens me greatly that the well-being of my sister is being compromised to save a few dollars and that other options are not being explored, besides community placement. For example, rather than closing SDC completely, options should be explored to transform the existing SDC community into something smaller that would still accommodate the special needs of the residents who call SDC home. It is important that the current residents have access to the critical care they need.

Instead of closing SDC entirely, I am asking that you please explore other options. For example, why not transform a section of the current SDC acreage into a smaller community that can house the 400 current residents, and continue to provide the specialized medical care and clinics as well as training that is provided today? There will always be a need for this type of community and specialized care. The infrastructure and experienced, skilled workers are already at the SDC. SDC can continue to serve as a safety net and resource in providing specialized medical care to a uniquely vulnerable population.

I don't want my sister to be moved into a setting that may threaten her health and well-being. She can't speak for herself, so I am speaking and advocating for her. Please do the right thing to help her and the other vulnerable residents of SDC stay in their own homes! I urge you to collaborate with the family members and staff of the individuals at Sonoma Developmental Center to put together a thoughtful plan to truly **transform** SDC **before** it closes so the residents can continue to live in their home and community.

Sincerely,

Joan Nolan