

September 23, 2015

Dear Department of Developmental Services,

I am writing to you as a concerned member of the local community in response to the Draft Plan for the Closure of Sonoma Developmental Center released September 15, 2015. After reviewing the Draft Plan and considering the current facts surrounding the care of developmentally disabled individuals in California it is clear that the proposed closure date of December 2018 is unreasonable. I will attempt to list below the reasons why the closure date of December 2018 is unreasonable. I also have questions about details of this Draft Plan and have included those as well and would like them to be answered by you.

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has worked diligently for more than twenty years to place residents from Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) in the community and has placed all residents who could be placed safely in community settings, though a number of those placed have been returned to SDC because their community placements failed. Some SDC residents have reportedly been deemed “inappropriate for community placement”. Most of those who remain at SDC have serious medical and/or behavioral needs, so serious that at present no appropriate community placements exist for them. To make matters worse, many community homes in California are closing. According to an article published in the Press Democrat (March 20, 2015), an Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA) report published this year and titled “On the Brink of Collapse” states that 435 residential homes for the disabled closed between 2009-2014 in California. Where do the developmentally disabled individuals who formerly lived in those 435 residential homes live now? How have those individuals fared since their homes were closed? Development of safe and reliable homes for the nearly 400 residents currently residing at SDC will require a lot more time and money than the Draft closure plan calls for. Funding for these homes, in perpetuity, will be essential for those who leave SDC and must be included in accurate, realistic amounts in the Closure plan. The only way to prevent the remaining SDC residents from becoming homeless, incarcerated, or otherwise misplaced is to have a firm

commitment that the state of California provide funds for safe, reliable, appropriate homes.

Housing and proper medical services for the disabled are only part of the continuum of services the state of California must provide. At present, community programs that provide day programs for developmentally disabled individuals are also struggling to stay afloat as the California state legislature fails to pass legislation to provide adequate funding to keep programs functioning. According to Jami R. Davis, Executive director of Marin Ventures, a program serving 108 people with developmental disabilities in a community-integration day program, current funding levels do not allow him to offer adequate wages to keep employees. According to Davis, "Our employees can earn more working in retail or restaurants." Becoming Independent is another program that would be used by some SDC residents who move out into the community. It has been in existence for almost 50 years and has not had any increase in fees for services in 20 years. According to Luana Vaeto, CEO of Becoming Independent (BI), some fees for service were cut during the recent recession and due to changing guidelines for how state funds are allocated, operating funds for BI have been reduced by \$100,000 a month. BI currently serves about 1,000 disabled individuals providing living support, jobs, educational and transportation programs to the disabled who live in the community. The programs offered by Becoming Independent and Marin Ventures, are mandated by law, yet not fully funded. According to the Lanterman Act, a law passed in 1969, "People with developmental disabilities and their families have a right to get the services and supports they need to live like people who don't have disabilities." State funding for these and other programs like them will be essential for those who leave SDC and needs to be included in accurate, realistic amounts in the Closure plans.

Below are the questions and concerns I have about elements of the Draft Closure Plan for Sonoma Developmental Center (September 15, 2015). I would like you to answer the questions and acknowledge the concerns in the final Draft for closure of SDC. I have included page and paragraph numbers from the Draft for each item.

•Page 2/paragraph 3-This section must include specifically all of the department that currently maintain SDC facilities and property and the state staff that residents require. These include and are not limited to: chaplains, special education teachers, music

therapists, Jr. Farm staff, dieticians, occupational therapists, plant operations staff, maintenance staff, water and steam plant management staff, transportation staff, fire fighting staff, and police services.

- Page 2/last paragraph-This must include accessibility to the public as well as families and decision makers.

- Page 3/paragraph one-Community State Staff Program (CSSP) must offer pay and benefits in line with current pay/benefits to state staff to follow SDC residents into the community.

- Page 77 paragraph one-All attachments must be attached to the Draft plan for us to have complete understanding of the Draft plan. According to this page, “attachments are still being compiled and organized and will be included in the October 1, 2015.” We must have access to all documents that this Draft cites as attachments.

- Page 4/paragraph 2 states that the Draft is not intended to detail where each individual who lives at SDC will move, but we must know generally where DDS is willing to consider moving SDC residents. Is DDS willing to move SDC residents outside of California? Is the DDS willing to move SDC residents to any part of California? Families must have assurance in writing in the Draft plan that their loved one currently residing at SDC be placed within a geographical area acceptable to the family.

- Page 5/last paragraph states that “providing services in the least restrictive environment appropriate for the person is strongly supported by state and federal laws and court decisions.” Is there a law that specifically prohibits us from developing homes on current grounds?

- Page 7/paragraph three-Would medical and/or behavioral care be made available within community placement homes or would developmentally disabled individuals need to travel to hospitals, clinics, etc. for most or all medical/behavioral support?

- Page 11/paragraph one- must state that “services will meet or exceed current levels of care provided at SDC”.

- Page 12/paragraph 3-All provisions to avoid problems that occurred when other DCs closed must be articulated exactly. Simply stating that the DDS will try to avoid repeating such mistakes is not a plan.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you regarding the questions I've included here.

Mari S. Emmons