



Official Statement from the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council on the Proposed Closing of Polk & White Haven Centers

The PA DD Council supports the Department of Human Services' proposed plan to close both Polk/White Haven Centers, because it aligns with our work. We support the 36 month process – one that assures that each resident will receive individual planning and choice in where they live and the services they need to be successful and happy in their new home.

The DD Council envisions a Commonwealth comprised of inclusive communities where all people are valued and thrive. To make a better future for people with disabilities, the Council funds short term projects that show new and innovative ways for people to participate as respected and valued members of our communities. We advocate for improved public policies and services so that people with developmental disabilities may benefit from the opportunities and resources available to all other citizens and community members.

The DD Council supports this decision for four significant reasons:

- 1. Moving from state operated institutional models of care to community living is the preferred location of service for people with disabilities and their families and the focus of the work for DD Councils throughout the United States.** In 1963 President John F. Kennedy signed the law now known as the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act). The DD Act has come to represent a fundamentally different vision of what it means to live with a developmental disability. It is a vision rooted in the belief that “disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of United States society.” This Federal Act has been continuously reauthorized and strengthened. In 1970, Congress established and authorized funding for Developmental Disabilities Councils (DD Councils) in each state in order to advocate for improved policies and community services.

2. **As a result of this work, the DD Council has been a witness to the changes that occur within disability services and within the larger community.** We no longer fund projects that “fix” people. Our thinking has evolved over the last thirty years and we now focus on projects that “fix” the physical and social environment. DD Council grants concentrate on systems and generic social change. The projects that we fund support people with developmental disabilities as they participate in valued roles as classmates, employees, college students, taxpayers, and neighbors. We also fund projects that hold the Department of Human Services and other state departments accountable to the quality of our community system.
3. **Life at a state center is no longer the life expected, nor desired for people with disabilities.** People with disabilities and their families, particularly parents of young children, see people with disabilities, and specifically their children, as members of their community – not as future residents of Polk, White Haven, Selinsgrove, or Ebensburg Centers.
4. **People with significant disabilities and with significant needs, are successfully living in their community NOW.** We know how to do this! The community system is massive – serving close to 40,000 individuals with disabilities. Many of these individuals have very significant disabilities, similar to the complex medical and behavioral needs of the residents in PA’s state centers.

In summary, when we know better, we must do better. The DD Council believes that now is the time to expect society to be welcoming of all its citizens. We expect that time, energy, and the money needed **should not** be spent on making state centers better places for people with significant disabilities to live. Instead we must focus our energy on building inclusive communities and making sure that when the people living at Polk Center/White Haven Center move, each individual moves to a place they choose and that all the services and supports they need are provided by qualified professionals.