Disability Rights Pennsylvania commends Secretary Miller and Governor Wolf on their announcement to close Polk and White Haven State Centers. Polk and White Haven are 2 of 4 remaining state-run institutions for persons with developmental disabilities in Pennsylvania.

The closure announcement today is the result of decades of movement away from institutional living in Pennsylvania. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sought to end the isolation and segregation of persons with disabilities. Court decisions have affirmed the right to move and live in the community. For decades, our Commonwealth has demonstrated that state operated institutions can close, and individuals can be moved into the community thoughtfully and safely. Today’s announcement affirms the Department of Human Services commitment to offer community-based living for people with disabilities.

Jean Searle, a self-advocate who herself has transitioned from institutional to community-based living had this to say about the closures: “If I stayed in the institution, I would not have the life I have today. I was not allowed to make my own choices or have any freedom in the institution. I was told when to do things and what I had to do. Now in the community, I have a choice of who is in my life, where I want to go, and what I want to do. The choices aren’t always easy, but they are mine to make.”

DRP’s mission is to protect and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities to live the lives they choose, free from abuse, neglect, segregation and discrimination.