



## NEWS RELEASE

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# Families, staff ask lawmakers to stop closures of disability centers

*Westerville* – Dozens of family members and staff from Montgomery and Youngstown Developmental Centers today called on legislators to keep the doors open of the two state facilities where severely developmentally disabled individuals reside. The Ohio Dept. of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) announced last month it would close the two centers where nearly 180 individuals live and 400 employees work.

Staff and family members from the Dayton and Youngstown areas arrived in downtown Columbus by bus to attend a budget hearing and testify in front of the Health and Human Service Subcommittee of the House Finance Committee.

Wearing t-shirts that read, “Support Choice. Stop the Closures,” staff who work in the state’s disability system and family members asked legislators to stop the closures and support House Bill 73 that would establish a “closure commission.” According to the legislation, a commission of stakeholders would review and make the final decision regarding any announced closure of a state facility.

Regina Woods, who has worked at the Montgomery Developmental Center for 18 years described to lawmakers the individuals she takes care of each day: “These men and women thrive on structure and some have been here for most of their lives. Some individuals have been at the center for almost 30 years. These individuals have extremely high needs with sometimes severe behavioral issues. They deserve to have choices for the care that fits their needs. When we take away these homes, we’re taking away that choice.”

The union representing the majority of employees in DODD has questioned the closure decision given a growing waiting list of 40,000 individuals who need services and a shortage of housing in the DD system. DODD has aggressively downsized the ten Developmental Centers already, with more than 400 hundred individuals being placed in other settings in the last four years alone, a 40 percent reduction.

Sean Murphy, who works at the Youngstown Developmental Center, challenged the myth that the state facilities aren’t integrated and community-based: “Integration is not based on bricks and mortar or what the outside of a building looks like. Integration is based on the amount of resources and the amount of staff the provider has. Believe me, there are plenty of individuals in group homes who are isolated and have little contact with their communities because of lack of resources or staff,” said Murphy.

Other staff testified about the changing role of the DCs in the last several years and how employees have adapted to that change. “We knew that the DCs were going to have a changing role in the system. The DCs get mostly court probates now, or adult offenders and individuals with dual diagnoses who have multiple challenges. We changed. We adapted. We got new training,” said Jeana Campolo, a direct care worker at Mt. Vernon Developmental Center and a union leader. “But now it feels like the rug is being pulled out from under us.”

Sally Tyler, a health care policy analyst for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, testified that recent rule changes by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services do not call for the closure of any state facilities: "...the alarmists who have said that the new CMS rule requires immediate elimination of some existing public services because of the setting in which they are currently provided here in Ohio are incorrect. Instead, the community settings rule lays out clear expectations about the person-centered emphasis and access to broader community required for compliance, and then allows states the flexibility to determine which of their current settings meet the guidelines or how they can be made compliant," Tyler said in testimony.

Additionally, the union reminded lawmakers that they have requested that the state offer other residential options, so employees can continue to take care of DC individuals in smaller settings.

*OCSEA represents approximately 30,000 state employees who work in a wide range of security, regulatory, administrative, direct care, maintenance, customer service and other positions, including approximately 1,800 who work in the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. For more information, contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).*