



August 28, 2014

Governor McAuliffe:

On behalf of the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD), we write to thank you for your leadership in supporting people with developmental disabilities by closing four of the Commonwealth's five training centers and moving towards greater integration of people with disabilities into the community. While we understand the need for temporary delays in order to build capacity and ensure successful transition, we urge you to continue along this positive trajectory of shifting from the antiquated model of institutional care towards providing the opportunity for all Virginians to live full, productive lives amongst family, friends, and fellow Virginians.

NACDD is the national association for the 56 Councils on Developmental Disabilities (DD Councils) in every U.S state and territory. The DD Councils are authorized under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) to advise on the best interests of people with developmental disabilities and to serve a key role of collaborating with others to change local systems to help fully integrate people with developmental disabilities into their communities. Importantly, the majority of each DD Council's members are volunteers, individuals with developmental disabilities or their family members appointed by you as Governor to share their unique perspectives and needs as constituents.

The DD Act, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year, focuses on integration stating 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." The *Olmstead* decision reinforces these rights. In this 1999 U.S. Supreme Court decision, the Court held that Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires a "public entity to administer programs in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities."

DD Councils have worked tirelessly under the DD Act to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, inclusion and integration into all aspects of society. I recently had the wonderful opportunity to attend a meeting of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (the DD Council) where I met many people with developmental disabilities who were sharing their experiences about living on their own and working in the community. I also had the opportunity to meet family members, professionals, advocates, and policymakers all working together to continue the important strides that the Commonwealth is making to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to employment, housing, education and other essential opportunities in order to be included in the community and to be valuable contributors to their state.

Thanks to technology and highly developed research and supports, people with even the most severe disabilities can now move from institutional settings to integrated community settings where they have greater choice over their life outcome. States all over the country have been successful in making this much needed move. For instance, the Rosewood Center, a residential facility for people with disabilities located near Baltimore, Maryland, closed in 2009 after 121 years of operation. As documented by the DD Council in Maryland, with proper transition and supports in place, former residents, many of whom had significant behavioral and medical needs, now live full, productive lives amongst their families and in society.

States are coming to realize that the best of all possibilities cannot be achieved while funding outdated institutional models. For instance, in Virginia there are nearly 9,000 individuals on the waiting list to receive home and community-based services through Medicaid waivers. This growing list of Virginians who want to be in their communities should be the impetus to move forward and expedite the great work you and your administration are doing. We congratulate you on the successful closure of Southside Virginia Training Center in June and we are confident that the remaining planned closures will yield similar success stories and open up endless opportunities to Virginians with disabilities and their families.

Governor, we applaud your efforts greatly for continuing on the right path towards full community integration for all people with disabilities. Your commitment to community life for all Virginians is clear and we are very appreciative of the thoughtfulness and hard work that you and your staff have put into this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Esmé v. Grant" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Esmé Grant
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