

Parents, guardians, advocates sue state to block closings of residential centers for severely disabled

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Warning that Gov. Pat Quinn's plans to close the state's residential developmental centers will leave severely disabled residents at risk of neglect, abuse and even death, parents, guardians and disability rights groups are suing the state in an attempt to block the closures.

Nearly a dozen parents and guardians of adults with serious mental or physical disabilities — including several from the Chicago area — have joined the [federal class-action lawsuit](#) against the Illinois Department of Human Services.

They say the closure late last year of the Downstate Jacksonville Developmental Center and the imminent closure of the Murray Developmental Center in Centralia mean hundreds of men and women who are unable to care for themselves will now have to live in one or two-bedroom homes which are neither medically licensed nor staffed with on-site medical professionals.

The Quinn administration, which ordered the closures as part of its efforts to close a \$13 billion budget deficit, says the move will both save money and place residents in small community settings where they can be more independent and live nearer their families. It has proposed to close up to four of the state's eight developmental centers and has won backing for its plans from some disability advocate groups, who say the centers institutionalize residents.

But Judy Sherwin, an attorney representing parents and guardians, said the state ultimately plans to close all eight centers. Many residents rely on round-the-clock medical care, she said, citing the case of a 55-year-old man who has the mental faculties of a nine-month old baby.

Calling the developmental centers "a safety net for the most severely disabled people in the state," she said that the state was imposing a "cookie cutter solution that doesn't fit everybody."

Januari Smith, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, declined to comment on the lawsuit but said that Quinn was committed to "increasing community care options."

"The process of transitioning individuals out of state operated developmental centers has been and will continue to be careful and deliberate," she added.

[The Case # is 1:13-CV-01300](#)

[Related article: New Push to Prevent Murray Developmental Center Closure \(WSIL TV Newscast \(video\) Feb. 13, 2013\)](#)