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November 22, 2013



Speaking out for people with
intellectual & developmental
disabilities



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VOR Weekly News Update

News and views for VOR Advocates

Someone really likes you!

This complimentary subscription is being shared with you at the request of a VOR member in celebration of VOR's 30th Anniversary. VOR is a national, nonprofit organization advocating for high quality care and human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism (I/DD). We're delighted to have this opportunity to share with you information about the work VOR does and the news and issues of importance to our constituency with I/DD. If you ever have any questions about our organization, please contact Julie Huso or Tamie Hopp at info@vor.net.

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Coming Up: HAPPY THANKSGIVING! There will be no Update on Friday, November 29, 2013.

Calendar Reminders

VOR and You

1. In Memoriam: Muriel Brody

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of long-time member, Muriel Brody.

Muriel provided significant behind-the-scenes support to her daughter, Jane Anthony, who has been an involved VOR leader for many, many years.

Muriel was a proud and concerned grandmother, offering her support to Jane as she forged a lifetime of advocacy for her son, Jason.

In recognition of Muriel's love for Jason, and as a way to continue her legacy of support, Jane Anthony and her sister, Margery Gaffin, have asked that any [donations in Muriel's memory be given to VOR.](#)

Jane may be reached at janthonyjane@comcast.net to express your sympathy.

[Funeral services in honor of Muriel Brody](#) will be Sunday, November 24, 2013 at 10:00 am at Boulevard Riverside Chapels, 1895 Flatbush Avenue (at Ave L.), Brooklyn, New York. VOR members in the area are welcome to attend. Those attending should arrive at the Chapel between 9:15 AM - 9:45 AM. Interment to follow at Wellwood Cemetery (Farmingdale, NY).

2. In gratitude: VOR expresses thanks to our

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members and advocates

VOR's Board of Directors and staff express thanks to VOR family of members and advocates this Thanksgiving season.

Each and every one of you is part of this national advocacy family that speaks for choice and actively defends that right.

“A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all the other virtues” (Cicero)

Our hearts are overflowing with thanks. We are grateful to each of you for your advocacy and financial assistance. Because of you, VOR has accomplished much this last year and are well positioned to carry forth our choice advocacy long into the future.

With warm appreciation,
Ann S. Knighton, President
Julie Huso, Executive Director
Tamie Hopp, Director of Govt. Relations & Advocacy

State News

3. Georgia: Closure of Georgia hospitals endangers quality mental health care (Opinion Editorial)

***Augusta Chronicle* * By A. Kenneth Fuller, M.D., Guest Columnist * Sunday, Nov. 17, 2013**

(The writer is a clinical associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Health Behavior of the Medical College of Georgia at Georgia Regents University.)

A sad succession of newscasts highlights the fact that people with mental disorders fall through the proverbial mental health safety net. In light of mass killings around the nation by disturbed individuals, mental health advocates

are flabbergasted that public mental health facilities are being closed haphazardly. The state of Georgia is a shameful and current illustration.

THE GEORGIA Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities operates six state hospitals in Atlanta, Milledgeville, Augusta, Columbus, Thomasville and Savannah. In May, without action from the Georgia legislature, DBHDD Commissioner Frank Berry, with the approval of Gov. Nathan Deal, abruptly announced that Southwestern State Hospital, the psychiatric hospital in Thomasville, will close Dec. 31.

Advocates quickly raised an alarm. They cite serious, well-documented problems with the state's behavioral health and developmental disabilities care transition programs. Concerned citizens urged caution. They advocated keeping SWSH open until replacement services have a proven track record.

Advocates and mental health professionals say that the need for scrutiny is growing as the DBHDD increasingly moves patients out of established hospital programs to untested, inadequate community services, aiming to control costs. The better approach is to improve quality through close management of patient care. Georgians need both hospitals and community services – not one or the other. The combination provides the best quality of care.

The federal government requires states to establish quality standards for institutions that treat severely and persistently mentally ill people. In 2010, Georgia and the federal government struck a "settlement agreement." Georgia's DBHDD, I believe, is attempting to cheat this protective oversight. This has resulted in a patchwork of ill-advised and unproven changes.

Georgia's track record of care for frail, developmentally disabled people released from state hospitals confirms tremendous deficiencies in health safety. Lacking the means to identify health status and safety needs was the proximate cause of the Justice Department's investigation of Georgia's DBHDD. The problems followed developmentally disabled patients into the community.

There is evidence of pervasive medical neglect, systematic abuse and lack of oversight – in some cases life-endangering. According to audits, safety compliance has remained low. Fewer than 27 percent of community providers have the means to identify health status and safety needs.

In Georgia's traditional state hospital system plus strong community services, individuals with mental health disorders would have a safety net. This net protects citizens.

[Read more, comment and share](#)

[Read Ann Knighton's Response \(November 19, 2013\). Ann is President of VOR and President of the East Central Georgia Regional Hospital's response](#)

Read Related: [Patient deaths spark protest of Gracewood moves \(January 2012\)](#)

4. New York: Per Senator Libous, Governor Cuomo open to “alternatives” on mental-health facility closures

Albany Watch * November 18, 2013

A top Republican in the state Senate said Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration will consider alternatives to closing four developmental centers and nine psychiatric hospitals, with a meeting with state lawmakers tentatively scheduled for next week on the

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issue.

Senate Deputy GOP Leader Thomas Libous, R-Binghamton, held a news conference Monday to speak out about the closures—which include the Greater Binghamton Health Center and the Broome Developmental Center in his district—and call for a “freeze” on implementing the plan until 2015.

Libous said he’s been in touch with the Cuomo administration, which told him they are open to a “counter proposal.” Last week, top Cuomo aide Larry Schwartz called Libous to set up a meeting with affected lawmakers and stakeholders. (Cuomo’s office confirmed the expected meeting.)

“I’m hoping that there’s an alternative to what they’ve proposed,” Libous said in a phone interview. “I’m hoping—speaking for the Southern Tier region—that we have some presence. Everything is designed to cut us out. It wipes out Elmira and Binghamton, and that’s not right.”

The closure plans hit the Southern Tier particularly hard, impacting about 1,000 jobs in the region, according to Libous. Of the nine planned psychiatric hospital closures, one is in Binghamton and another in Elmira. A separate plan to close facilities for the developmentally disabled hits Binghamton by March 2016.

At the news conference in Binghamton, Libous shared the podium with top officials from local hospitals, jails and county mental-health offices to speak out against the closure plan. He said he would soon introduce a bill to implement the two-year “freeze,” but said talk of the closures can’t wait until the budget process opens in January.

“It’s a crisis,” Libous said. “It’s something that needs to be really thought out and looked at, and that’s why I’m asking for a freeze until April 1, 2015.”

UPDATE: In a statement, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, D-Endwell, Broome County, said she would introduce the same bill in the Legislature's lower house.

"I appreciate Senator Libous' efforts to postpone the proposed closures of both the Greater Binghamton Health Center and the Broome Developmental Center with his moratorium legislation," Lupardo said in a statement. "I plan to introduce the same bill in the Assembly, along with Assemblyman Crouch. After the public hearings and community forums that we held, it became clear that the proposed changes need much further review."

[Read more, comment and share](#)

5. Virginia: State inspector general investigates why Deeds's son was released before attack

***The Washington Post* * November 21, 2013**

Virginia's inspector general began an investigation Wednesday into why the son of state Sen. R. Creigh Deeds was released from psychiatric care the day before he apparently stabbed his father and then fatally shot himself.

And Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) said he has directed his top health official to conduct a review of state and local mental-health services in the wake of the incident.

Bill Hazel, Virginia's secretary of health and human resources, promised to push for changes if further deficiencies are discovered. McDonnell, his boss, told The Washington Post that Hazel would review the chain of events that led to the tragedy and that he would propose any necessary fixes in the coming state budget.

Austin Deeds, who was 24, had undergone a psychiatric evaluation Monday, and officials initially said the reason he was not admitted to a

hospital was that no bed was available. But multiple nearby hospitals later confirmed that they had available space but were never contacted.

Initially, the attack drew rebukes about mental-health funding in Virginia, but the fact that services were available for Austin Deeds is likely to shift the scrutiny to local community services boards, which get some funding from local governments but are licensed and overseen by the state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

A number of state officials and mental-health advocates said Wednesday that care for the mentally ill has improved since Virginia Tech. The General Assembly approved a package that provided \$42 million in new funding for mental-health services over two years and changed state laws to make it easier to involuntarily commit the mentally ill to hospitals.

However, a 2012 report by the nonprofit Treatment Advocacy Center found that Virginia had only 37 percent of the beds considered necessary by the group to treat its population. The report ranked Virginia 19th in total number of treatment beds per capita.

[Read more, comment and share](#)

Related news: [VOR Slams Justice Department Plan to Close Virginia Centers for Disabled \(January 27, 2012\)](#)

Quotable, by VOR Member

"Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future." ~ John F. Kennedy

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**[Calendar Reminders:](#)
**[Tuesday, March 25, 2014](#)
[AHCA/NCAL's fifth annual "ID/DD Residential](#)****

[Services Providers Hill Fly-In."](#) Questions? Dana Halvorson, dhalvorson@ahca.org.

June 8, 2014

VOR 2014 Annual Conference and Initiative:
"Making it Happen: Reforming Policy and Law in Support of Person-Centered Quality and Choice"; Hyatt Regency, Washington, D.C. [Details coming soon](#)

Week of June 9, 2013

VOR 2014 Congressional Initiative: Families and advocates visit Capitol Hill. [Details coming soon](#)

Sunday, October 5, 2014

American Health Care Association's 2014 ID/DD Residential Services Day during AHCA/NCAL's 65th Annual Convention & Expo at the Gaylord National Harbor just outside of Washington, DC. Registration will open in Spring 2014.

Archives

***Social Media Strengths: Using Facebook and Twitter to Advance Your Cause (VOR, July 2013).** [Visit VOR's website for a copy of the powerpoint presentation and an audio of the event.](#)

*** How Congress Works Webinar:** [Recorded - Listen Here.](#) Tuesday, April 23, 2013 - 12:00 pm central / 1:00 pm eastern. How Congress Works: The Basics. Hosted by Peter Kinzler and Larry Innis.

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