

**SOUTHERN OKLAHOMA RESOURCE CENTER/PARENT GUARDIAN ASSOCIATION  
(SORC/PGA)**

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**In Light Of State Question 765, Group Says DHS Commission Should Cancel Planned Vote**

According to a DHS agency spokesperson, the Oklahoma Commission for Human Services will consider voting at its November 1, 2012, meeting on whether to close one or both of Oklahoma's two Resource Centers for the developmentally disabled. Noting that many questions remain unanswered, the Southern Oklahoma Resource Center/Parent Guardian Association (SORC/PGA) has requested the Oklahoma Commission for Human Services to not vote on the future of SORC and/or its sister facility, the Northern Oklahoma Resource Center of Enid (NORCE) at the November 1, 2012 meeting—which is only days before the vote on State Question 765. If State Question 765 passes on November 6, 2012, the Commission would cease to exist at the end of 2012, and would be replaced with four advisory committees—one of which will focus on issues related to developmentally disabled adults in Oklahoma.

"Too many questions remain regarding the future of the fragile clients who reside at these facilities," said SORC/PGA President Ken Talley. "It would be imprudent for the Commission to make such a critical decision just days before the vote on State Question 765. Of equal concern is a vote on the future of the two centers on the first work day of Ed Lake, the newly hired director of DHS, the agency the Commission oversees."

The SORC/PGA is concerned that the Commission may vote to close SORC by moving some of its clients to the NORCE facility in Enid, while making no specific provision for the many who remain. The Commission fails to recognize a major flaw in any plan to move SORC residents to NORCE. According to Mary Ann Paulsen, SORC/PGA Secretary, "the uninhabited buildings being planned for use at NORCE do not meet current federal certification standards, and those standards will be applicable if the State attempts to reopen those buildings for the purpose of receiving SORC residents." She also notes, "moving SORC residents to Enid will make it difficult for families from southern Oklahoma to visit their loved ones, and that DHS's own data shows that attempts to provide the level of care needed in a community setting will cost the State considerably more than providing services at SORC." "On February 28, 2012, a similar plan developed by the Developmental Disabilities Services Division of DHS under House Bill 2184 was soundly rejected by the Legislature for the same reasons now being voiced by the SORC/PGA."

Until July of this year, two of the Commissioners were from Enid. The SORC/PGA believes that the Enid Commissioners were influenced out of fear to support the plan to close SORC, in order to protect or avoid losing the Enid facility. One of the Enid Commissioners, unexpectedly, introduced such a plan at the June 2012 Commission meeting. After revelations of violations of the Open Meetings Act, Governor Fallin halted any vote on that plan at the upcoming July 2012 meeting. The July 2012 meeting was the last for one of the two Enid Commissioners. Plus, a vote at that time would have been the first for two new commissioners just appointed before the July meeting. Also, it would have been done without two other commissioners, who were just appointed, later, in August. In recent weeks, the Oklahoma County District Attorney has cited agencies for possible Open Meetings Act violations. "There have been evasive

attempts to pass plans that would negatively affect SORC,” states Frank Appl, SORC/PGA Treasurer. “On July 12, 2012, we submitted a written reply to numerous mistakes and inaccuracies in the plan, surprisingly, submitted at the June meeting by Commissioner Peck of Enid. We also submitted our own formal plan to the Commission, which included a request for information on the care and status of similar clients that have been moved over the years from SORC, NORCE and the former Hissom Center,” Appl states. The SORC/PGA has not yet received any written reply or acknowledgment of these documents.

Also, the Commission’s November 1, 2012 meeting will occur on Ed Lake’s first day as the new Director of DHS. “We do not see the rationale for voting and moving in a negative way at this point regarding the two resource centers. We think there should now be direct dialogue on the specific issues that we have raised and formally submitted to the Commission,” states SORC/PGA member, Ryan Whitlow. Mr. Lake frankly admitted in a recent news story that he does not know Oklahoma well enough yet to voice an opinion on whether SORC and NORCE should be closed. In that same story, Mr. Lake mischaracterized the State’s Resource Centers as “institutions,” and stated that many social workers have advocated moving SORC residents to community-based settings as a way to improve their way of life. This statement is simply untrue. Individual Habilitation Plans prepared by the social services professionals who work directly with the clients at SORC have concluded that in many cases SORC, rather than the community, is the most appropriate placement.

The main proponents for closure of the Resource Centers appear to be Jim Nicholson, who heads the Developmental Disabilities Services Division, and private community care providers who stand to profit from such a decision. From the very beginning of the current push for closure, the expressed motive for closing the Resource Centers has been to save money rather than to improve the welfare of the residents. At the December 6, 2011 Commission meeting, where a hastily and flawed plan to close SORC was presented and rejected by the Commission, Nicholson characterized the closure issue as simply a matter of “bricks and mortar.” During this same time period, a community care provider invited parents and guardians of the Resource Centers to an evening meeting at its office. A member of the Commission and an attorney who had pursued protracted litigation against the State concerning the now-closed Hissom Center attended and made a presentation in support of closure. Afterward, the provider distributed promotional information.

The SORC/PGA has asked the Commission and DHS to respond to the formal plan it submitted on July 12, 2012. That plan requests DHS to use funds generated by mineral interests, funds statutorily-dedicated to SORC, for sprinkler systems in three residential buildings; to make information available regarding the status of similarly situated clients who have been transferred from the Resource Centers and treated in the community; and to establish a committee for meaningful dialogue between the agency, SORC’s employees, and most importantly, the parents and guardians of the residents.

“We hope the Commission will take the time to become knowledgeable of these important issues and involve us in decisions regarding our loved ones,” concluded Talley. “We are concerned that clients with such serious disabilities will not do well in community care settings, and the cost of care will be much more. If State Question 765 passes and an advisory committee for the developmentally disabled established, the SORC/PGA reasonably expects to be represented on that committee. Any vote on the future of SORC at the Commission’s November 1, 2012 meeting will unnecessarily interfere with the advisory committee structure that may well be in place by January 2013, and ignores the requests in SORC/PGA’s most recent plan.”

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