

CONNECTICUT REPORT, Martha M. Dwyer, State Coordinator

The situation in Connecticut for individuals wishing to reside in ICF congregate residential facilities has worsened significantly during the past few years.

Connecticut presently has one large congregate facility, Southbury Training School (STS), which houses approximately 260 individuals, most of whom suffer from severe intellectual and physical disabilities. There are also and five regional centers, which house, I believe, up to 50 people, who are also severely disabled.

STS has been closed to admissions since 1986 and its population has declined significantly since that date, due both to deaths and to moves into the community.

Connecticut is presently suffering a huge budget deficit and across-the-board funding cuts have recently been made. Many STS staff members have been terminated, including all cooks and cooking staff, the individuals who ran the music therapy program and a variety of other staff members who serve various functions. STS is going through a difficult adjustment although crucial services will remain and it is expect to retain ICF status. Providers of community care have not received an increase in funding for approximately seven years and they, too, are suffering.

In addition, pursuant to a litigation settlement of 2010, STS staff is required to advise guardians of the advantages of group homes and the program is overseen by a "remedial expert". The individual who served as remedial expert since 2010 recently retired and his replacement is taking an aggressive approach, requiring staff to increase pressure on guardians to move their wards. I believe that few guardians are presently choosing to transfer their wards into the community.

Two of the five regional centers are scheduled for closure on June 30. Residents have been offered the choice of moving into the remaining regional centers or into the community. A group of guardians is opposing the closures but I have not been advised of what actions they are taking.

Opponents of congregate care continue to be vocal and active. They have proposed closure of STS and the regional centers prior to 2020 and have obtained the support of many legislators. In the fall of last year, the Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDA) requested recommendations regarding the closure of STS. The Home and School Association of STS (H&S) of which I am president and Hugo is treasurer, submitted a lengthy document opposing closure. Among other things, we noted increased mortality in the community, problems with the quality of care and services, the cost of moving individuals (purchasing and adapting homes particularly, estimated to exceed \$75,000,000) and the right to choice. The document can be found on the H&S website, homeandschoolsts.org, and (we believe) is worth reading. It provides many arguments that can be applied to other facilities.

The Hartford Courant, the largest circulation newspaper in Connecticut, which has long endorsed closure, recently published an article regarding a study of abuse and neglect. The article described many shocking instances of abuse and neglect, primarily in the community and pointed out that DDS has failed in its responsibility to conduct investigations.