

Proposed Closure of Vineland Developmental Center

Issue

Providing community-based services to people with developmental disabilities has been considered best practice for over thirty years. Despite this, and national trends toward reducing reliance on institutional services, New Jersey continues to operate seven large state-run institutions with a total census of about 2,700 people. In fact, we have not actually *closed* an institution in this state since 1998, and yet, we have reduced our institutional census by nearly 1,200 people since that last closure. We simply do not require seven large institutions anymore. In recognition of this fact, the FY2012 proposed budget includes a provision to close Vineland Developmental Center over the next two years.

Concern

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of misleading information being circulated about issues related to the closure. Some of the misconceptions that have been expressed, and our responses to them, are as follows:

1. MYTH: *"1,000 state workers will lose their jobs if this closure goes through."*

FACT: There will likely be some job loss over the two year period in which Vineland is closed. However, the individuals who are slated to move into the community will still require care, opening up many new positions in the community. DDD has also stated that they will work with staff to help them secure new jobs at other developmental centers, psychiatric hospitals, state-operated group homes, or in the community. Finally, DDD has clearly stated that no jobs will be lost during FY2012 based on this proposal; any job loss that does occur is not expected until the following year, giving people more than ample time to plan and secure new employment. But perhaps most importantly, we believe that potential job loss is simply not a good enough reason to continue to support seven large institutions. Studies clearly show that people experience an improved quality of life when they are moved from an institution into the community. Every dollar that we invest into keeping these large (typically very old) buildings running could be used to further build up the community-based infrastructure to serve more people in a more integrated setting.

2. MYTH: *"The community cannot safely serve these individuals. They are 'too disabled' to live anywhere but an institution."*

FACT: While there are certainly some individuals with very significant disabilities currently residing in the state's institutions, there are many other individuals with *equally significant* disabilities residing in community-based settings. Furthermore, DDD has assured us that no individual will be moved into the community unless the supports are first put in place to ensure that they will be able to access the care they require. We must ensure that all transitions are done thoughtfully and carefully. Finally, any individual who continues to choose institutional services or who the state feels cannot be served in the community will not be moved into the community and will instead be transferred to another developmental center for their ongoing care.

3. **MYTH:** *“This plan devalues developmental centers. Developmental centers are wonderful places that should be appreciated.”*

FACT: We do not dispute that the developmental centers provide high quality care for some individuals and we absolutely respect the value they have added to the lives of so many individuals and their families for so many years. However, we simply do not require seven institutions at this point in time. Reallocating resources to better serve more people just makes practical sense. We do not interpret the proposal to close Vineland Developmental Center as an attack on the quality of care in New Jersey’s institutions and feel strongly that as long as institutions remain open, they must receive adequate funding to continue to meet the needs of the people they serve.

4. **MYTH:** *“This proposal takes away choice. One size doesn’t fill all.”*

FACT: We absolutely agree that choice is essential! We strongly believe that no one who wants to continue to receive institutional care should be forced to move into a community-based setting. Furthermore, we have been assured that tenet will be fully respected during the closure of Vineland Developmental Center. We believe that this should not become a debate about choice, as we have been guaranteed that choice will be respected.

5. **MYTH:** *“People will die as a result of this institutional closure.”*

FACT: This assertion is completely unsubstantiated. It is critical that this closure be handled in a way that ensures that all individuals are safe and can continue to access all of the care they require. Notably, according to “Deinstitutionalization and Mortality: Findings of a Controlled Research Design in New Jersey,” a peer reviewed study published in the *American Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* on the final outcomes of the last institutional closure in New Jersey, “there is no evidence that deinstitutionalization in New Jersey is associated with increased mortality, and no other negative consequences of deinstitutionalization were found.”

6. **MYTH:** *“Organizations are going to ‘get rich’ off the closure.”*

FACT: This assertion is also not true and is blatantly insulting to the provider organizations that provide community-based care to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the state. The majority of these organizations are non-profit agencies who provide 24-hour care, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for individuals with very complex needs. These agencies have not realized an increase in their contracts commensurate with inflation for over 15 years now. The vast majority of direct care staff working for these agencies are caring individuals who work long hours for very little pay doing difficult work. Unsubstantiated claims that these agencies are “getting rich” from the developmental disabilities system should be completely ignored.

Recommendation

Support a final FY2012 Budget that includes the closure of Vineland Developmental Center and the necessary bridge fund to ensure it is done properly.