

Feb. 20, 2011

To: Teri Doolittle <teridoolittle@gmail.com>

Dear Teri,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to my remarks about "inclusion."

I can understand your reaction and realize that my remarks should have been put into context. I hoped to draw attention to the fact that the term "inclusion" has become a hot button word used by federally funded agencies as a substitute for **choice**. I was also responding to their recent allegations to CMS re: "segregated housing" and "meaningful inclusion" and to their recent tactics to subvert our new legislation to amend Ch. 419.

To review the legislation briefly: SB 1166, which was signed into law in June, was an amendment to Ch. 419 that exempts group homes from the 1,000 ft. distancing rule if they are part of a planned residential community designed for people with developmental disabilities. This legislation was endorsed by our FCC.

The intent of this legislation was to provide innovative residential options as an alternative to isolated group homes and supported living arrangements that are inappropriate for many people with DD's, and to introduce to Florida some of the wonderful contributions of planned residential communities both nationally and internationally.

Our federally funded agencies (Florida Developmental Disability Council, Advocacy Center, University Centers) using our tax dollars, vehemently lobbied against the Bill, using inflammatory rhetoric and propaganda, claiming that we would be using Medwaiver dollars to create "institutions."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Medwaiver funding would not in any way be used for bricks and mortar. Group homes receive their reimbursement through the clients who are authorized for residential habilitation.

Essentially, this has become a contest over money and perceived by these organizations as a loss of funding intended for the Home and Community Based Waiver (HCBW).

I was at the forefront of the legislative battles over the past two years, working with Sen. Altman who agreed to introduce legislation to amend Ch. 419. I attended most of the committee meetings in Tallahassee in witness to these attacks.

The FDDC also sent out messages under the banner of "Inclusion Now" in addition to comments to CMS against any form of congregate living.

The Florida Center for Inclusive Communities under Nila Benito sent out many inflammatory messages and an editorial using the terms "segregated," "isolated,"

"discriminating," "institutions," condemning congregate living in favor of "inclusive living." (Letter attached).

Very significantly, Sharon Lewis, Commissioner of the Administration for Developmental Disabilities sent a letter to Ms. Benito (also attached), warning her of the violation of the ADD-PI-01-1.

As arguments developed, the issue became one of choice. We already have "inclusion" in the sense of freedom to access public facilities, educational opportunities and HCBW funding. That's a wonderful thing. Unfortunately, the argument has become one of inclusion vs. choice. The inclusionists argue that the HCBW should not be available to people living in congregate settings. They argue that planned residential communities are segregated. Ironically, in the five Work Group sessions sponsored by the FDDC that I attended this past year, not one member of the Council had ever visited a planned residential community where interaction is the rule.

The most current argument used by these agencies since our legislation became a law is that Medwaiver funding should be denied to people who are not living in the broader community, regardless of the fact that they would have no other alternative other than institutionalization.

This has been an affront by policy makers to individuals and their families whose rights to decide where and with whom they reside are guaranteed by the DD Act.

Regarding "inclusion" in the educational setting, there have been many lawsuits over issues involved in public education. As a former classroom teacher as well as a speech pathologist in the public school system, I can appreciate the wide range of abilities and disabilities that come into play where inclusion in all classrooms is an issue. The intent of my remark was that all children should have the educational services that are appropriate for them, whether they are inclusive or special. Frequently children with special needs are inappropriately mainstreamed in favor of "inclusion." Be assured, I have never lobbied the school inclusion issue.

I apologize if I have unfairly generalized about "inclusion." However, I firmly believe that our children with developmental disabilities should be served appropriately and that our adult family members have the same right of inclusion in the choice of residential opportunities afforded to all other citizens.

Regards,

Lila