

[DATE]

The Honorable **[First & Last Name]**
[Office Address]
[Office Address Line #2]
[City, State, Zip]

Dear **[Representative's Title] [Last Name]**,

As a **[Insert Town]**, NJ resident who is also the **[Insert Relationship]** of a person with an intellectual/developmental disability, I have become increasingly concerned over the current debate regarding the closure of institutions in our state. Due to several factors which I have listed below, I feel I must urge you to support the closure of **[at least one of our seven]** NJ Developmental Centers.

While there has been a considerable amount of discussion surrounding the well-being of the more than 2,000 individuals currently being served within the centers, as well as the future of employees who staff these centers, very little consideration has been given to the tens of thousands of individuals and families who are in dire need of community-based services – services which are currently limited due to the high cost of maintaining New Jersey's institutional care system.

As a fellow family member of an individual with significant developmental disabilities, I can certainly relate to the concerns of the several hundred family members of institution residents who insist that the centers remain open, believing that their loved one cannot receive the appropriate level of care needed in community settings. Likewise, my family and I hold the well-being and proper care of our **[Relative]** in the upmost importance. However, my family, along with tens of thousands of other families within the state, has struggled considerably to find such care in a more inclusive setting so that our loved one is able to live amongst family and friends and take advantage of the many benefits of living within the community that any other New Jersey resident enjoys.

This large and over-looked majority of individuals and families have experienced the direct negative effects of keeping open one of the largest institutional care systems in the country. Such families want community-based care for their relatives, but do not have access to it due to the lack of public funding available to expand housing and other services in the community – funding which is currently being tied up in running seven large institutions. Many of these centers are operating at far below residential capacity, serving an ever-dwindling population of individuals, at least 600 of whom are also waiting for housing within the community.

There are several points that I urge you to consider when deciding the level at which New Jersey needs institutional care facilities.

1. 34% of the New Jersey's total budget for developmental disabilities services goes to maintaining our seven institutions – serving less than 5% of our state's service-eligible DD population. One center is currently in need of more than \$20 million dollars in repairs just to remain habitable. Only one other state in the nation, Mississippi, spends less of their DD budget on community services for people with disabilities.
2. Currently, the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities has a waiting list of some 8,000 individuals who, along with their families and/or guardians, are expressly seeking community living arrangements and services. Some have been on this list for well over a decade, and nearly all reject the option of institutionalization for their loved one.
3. It is estimated that in NJ, more than 26,000 community residents with developmental disabilities have caregivers who are aged 60 years or older. Many of these families have continued to provide care into their later years specifically so that their loved one does not need to be moved into an institution. However, such family members, some of whom have had their loved ones on

waiting lists for decades, are coming ever-closer to the point where they will no longer be able to provide care on their own. If the state cannot find a community opening for them, these aging caregivers will have no other option than to place their loved one in the kind of institutional setting they've worked to keep them out of for years.

4. The US Supreme Court's 1999 *Olmstead Decision* ruled that, according to the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, a state must make every reasonable effort to offer community-based housing and support service options, so that an individual with developmental disabilities does not need to rely on a segregated institutional setting to receive such services. Failure to do so would be considered unlawful discrimination. In fact, in the eight years prior to the state's recent decision to close two of our institutions, Disability Rights New Jersey had a pending lawsuit against the state for failing to meet its constitutional requirements under *Olmstead*.

On a personal level, the state's operation of seven large developmental centers has had a significant effect on my family.

[Insert Personal Story Here]

As a constituent, I hope that you will consider my letter as you and other members of the Legislature consider matters that impact the closure of our state's developmental centers.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Your Address]
[Your Phone Number]
[Your Email]