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Contact Tamie at 605-399-1624; Tamie327@hotmail.com for information
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ACTION ITEMS

- 1. VOR will have a NEW website; Seeking YOUR pictures
- 2. **H.R. 1255: COSPONSORS NEEDED: Cosponsors don't just "happen" - YOU need to ask.**
- 3. President's Budget Could Reduce Charitable Giving

STATE NEWS

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 - 6. UTAH: New duplexes to open on campus: Residents excited, but critics upset by extra costs
 - 7. LOUISIANA: Abita could get village for disabled: 100 acres includes homes, work options
- =====

1. VOR will have a NEW website; Seeking YOUR pictures

VOR has enlisted the help of NeigerDesign, Inc. to completely renovate VOR's website. To help personalize VOR's Mission, we would very much like to have digital pictures of you and your loved one with developmental disabilities.

Please email your photos to Tamie Hopp at Tamie327@hotmail.com. By emailing your photos you are consenting to have your image and/or that of your family member on VOR's website and in other VOR marketing material.

Photos will only be used for VOR's purposes and will not be sold.

2. H.R. 1255: COSPONSORS NEEDED: Cosponsors don't just "happen" - YOU need to ask.

We need your help to enlist cosponsors to H.R. 1255!
See, <http://www.vor.net/HR1255Alert.htm> for an alert, including template messages, on this important bill.

H.R. 1255 already has 16 cosponsors!

- Moran (D-VA)*
- Paul (R-TX)*
- Cohen (D-TN)*
- Lungren (R-CA)*
- Poe (R-TX)*
- Goodlatte (R-VA)*
- Dreier (R-CA)*
- Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)*

Kanjorski (D-PA)*
Culberson (R-TX)
Olver (D-MA)
Gutierrez (D-IL)
Capuano (D-MA)
Wolf (R-VA)
McGovern (D-MA)
Barrow (D-GA)

[* = Original Cosponsors: These Members of Congress joined Rep. Frank as cosponsors upon introduction of H.R. 1255 on March 3].

CALL TODAY!!

It is up to VOR members and advocates who support residential choice to get this bill passed. We need to line up as many **cosponsors** as possible as quickly as we can.

CALL TODAY!!

Congress: Congress.org (enter your zip)
Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121

3. President's Budget Could Reduce Charitable Giving

A proposal in President Obama's budget would impose new limits on charitable tax deductions. For those who earn more than \$250,000, the provision would limit the federal tax deduction they may take for their generosity to 28 percent.

Currently, they may claim up to a 35 percent deduction. This tax policy change would effectively devalue charitable gifts made by the very people who are in a position to make substantial donations at a time when they are sorely needed.

Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy recently noted that the budget proposal to limit deductions and raise rates, if applied in 2006, would have reduced giving by nearly \$4 billion.

What You Can Do

The good news is that the White House might be rethinking its support of this proposal. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner suggested this week that the White House might drop or modify its proposal to lower the charitable tax deduction for the wealthiest donors.

If you oppose this proposal, let the White House, your two senators and House member hear from you.

Template Message

I urge President Obama to remove the provision from his budget that would impose new limits on charitable tax deductions.

If this provision is enacted, it would have an incredibly negative impact on charitable giving. Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy recently estimated that the budget proposal to limit deductions and raise rates, if applied in 2006, would have reduced giving by nearly \$4 billion.

In these challenging times, charities and nonprofits already are finding it difficult to fulfill their missions because of reduced donations and resources. At the same time, charities are being asked to provide even greater levels of assistance.

For these reasons and for the sake of the nonprofit community, I strongly urge the president to removal this provision from the budget.

CONTACTS

The White House: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>
Congress: Congress.org (enter your zip)
Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121

4. MASSACHUSETTS: Breaking faith: Disruption in no one's best interest

Summary: The Worcester Telegram & News Gazette OPPOSES the closure of Glavin Regional Center and three other developmental centers in Massachusetts. To show your support by submitting a comment visit: <http://www.telegram.com/article/20090307/NEWS/903070341/1020> (click, Add a Comment).

March 07, 2009 12:00AM
Worcester Telegram & News Gazette

State authorities should re-examine the rationale behind the proposed closing of the Glavin Regional Center and three other state institutions for the developmentally disabled and the placement of some 476 residents into group homes.

There are only two reasons to disrupt the lives of residents and their families: improving residents' long-term welfare and saving taxpayer money. The closures are unlikely to achieve either.

Those touting "community care" certainly have residents' benefit at heart, but those able to adapt to more independent living have already been moved. Remaining residents, including the 55 at the Glavin Center, are largely older people who have lived in state institutions for years. They already have a home and a community.

The supposed savings of \$40 million is highly questionable. Residents in community homes will continue to need at least as many services as in the larger facilities, and homes run by profit-making entities still need state oversight.

Department of Mental Retardation Commissioner Elin Howe admitted as much when she said at a hearing in Shrewsbury Wednesday that the state is working on plans to improve group homes, beginning with a new system to monitor them, and is committing significant resources (read money) to serve residents who move.

State officials who hope to reap a one-time windfall from the sale of institutions' land and buildings are likely to be disappointed. Current market conditions will minimize profits, and the costs of vacant institutions can be large - witness the closure of Rutland Heights Hospital, where the state had to commit \$2.1 million in 2003 alone to begin cleanup of the shuttered hospital, costs that increased to more than \$10 million in the following years.

The plan to shuffle disabled residents into new homes breaks faith with everyone - residents, their families, longtime employees, and the taxpayers.

5. TEXAS: Editorial: Don't cut options for mentally disabled children

Summary: The Dallas Morning News OPPOSES legislation that calls for the closure of Texas facilities for persons with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. For letters to editor in response to this editorial, see, <http://dallasmorningviewsblog.dallasnews.com/archives/letters-to-the/state-politics/>

Don't cut options for mentally disabled children
Friday, February 27, 2009
Dallas Morning News
Editorial

All along, we've thought the only way the Legislature could satisfy Texas parents with mentally disabled sons and daughters is to give the families' choices.

Those parents who wish to put their children into one of the state's dozen large homes for the mentally disabled should have that option. Those who prefer smaller, community-based homes should have that option, too. And the state should recognize the strong passions that exist for each approach - and we do mean strong. The debate over this issue runs almost as hot as it does over abortion.

Unfortunately, state Sen. Rodney Ellis of Houston and Rep. Patrick Rose of Dripping Springs have declared war on the choice option. The two Democrats are pushing a proposal that would reward Texas families that prefer a community home of 16 or fewer residents for their mentally disabled children - at the expense of families that would rather take advantage of a larger state home, like the one in Denton.

Under the Ellis-Rose plan, the state's budget writers would start financing more beds at community-based homes, which might be fine except that they would get the money from revenues that now go into the state schools.

The money grab would force the state to close some state schools. We have said before that the governor should have the power to close a state school if abuses are egregious, but in no way should a state school have to shut down simply to finance more community-care options.

For one thing, the state still has spotty standards for evaluating community homes. Ellis and Rose rightly want to improve their quality, but the state's track record is not great.

We strongly encourage the rest of the Legislature to think of a way in which both sides can win. This will require more money, no question, but the state's budget situation is not as dire as it appeared a month ago.

Bottom line: The state should maximize options. The Ellis-Rose proposal restricts them. And that's not the way to help families searching for the best care for a mentally disabled child.

6. UTAH: New duplexes to open on campus: Residents excited, but critics upset by extra costs

By Julia Lyon
The Salt Lake Tribune
March 7, 2009

American Fork -Nearly two years behind schedule and almost half a million dollars over budget, new housing for the disabled will open this month, giving people like Jason Fitch a new place to call home.

"I can be on my own, plus I'm going to get cable," said the 34-year-old, who expects to have fewer roommates after he moves in.

But construction changes and delays meant getting Fitch and other residents into the one-story duplexes, originally budgeted at \$2.1 million, took much longer than anyone expected. Staff at the Utah State Developmental Center, where the residences are located, stopped making tenant lists to avoid dashing residents' hopes.

"We just stopped talking about it," said Karen Clarke, the center's superintendent.

The new townhomes, also known as twinhomes, will open as the disabled community is bracing for leaner programs and government services. State officials are hoping federal stimulus money may prevent many budget cuts and maintain services, but recent legislative proposals still include reductions that could affect programs.

The delays and extra costs "disappointed and saddened" some of the state's advocates for the disabled, who generally disagree with institutionalization.

"We want to see people have real choices about living in the community," said Matt Knotts, executive director of the Disability Law Center in Salt Lake City.

"This has not been realized [with the on-campus duplexes] and if anything demonstrates inefficiencies."

The Utah State Developmental Center serves about 235 Utahns with developmental and other disabilities in its residential facility. Some have behavior issues and are sent by courts for rehabilitation, but others are medically more fragile than community resources currently can serve. Some stay for a few years; others for decades.

The center's population will remain the same as about 35 residents of the new townhomes leave empty rooms for other residents to use. The shift will allow the center to close housing that had safety, privacy and design issues. That building will be converted for daily activity use.

Workers broke ground on the townhouses in 2006. Delays were driven by conflicting interpretations of Americans with Disabilities Act rules, changes to building plans and difficulty in finding workers during a building boom.

In one case, an inspector hired by the state Division of Facilities Construction and Management believed the width of a shower stall was within the law.

Another state inspector disagreed, arguing some stalls were one inch too narrow, requiring contractors to tear up the wall.

"The intent of the law in all of these facilities has been met," said Gregg Buxton, DFCM director. "The letter of the law, the exact dimension is what this is all over."

The extra ADA costs were borne by the contractor, Bird Construction and Development, but the state exceeded its contingency fund, which is rare. The spending was primarily related to changes to a utility room and the exhaust system to meet state requirements.

Part of the delays stemmed from discussions between the state and the construction company about who was responsible for which cost and what those costs were. But state officials say money wasn't wasted -- it was spent on necessary changes.

One lesson learned: the DFCM will now involve inspectors earlier, officials say. Part of the challenge for builders was making the units both home-like and compatible with the law.

"That clearly was more of a challenge than we anticipated and even more than the center anticipated," said Brian Tolley, the project manager.

Roger Holden, 54, will move into one of the older rooms vacated by a new townhouse resident. He has mental retardation and cerebral palsy and has lived at the center since 1980. His sister, Kathy Ackman, believes the new space will be good for him, although she has been happy with where he lived.

"Maybe you'll get to help cook," she told him

7. LOUISIANA: Abita could get village for disabled: 100 acres includes homes, work options

Sunday, February 22, 2009
By Benjamin Alexander-Bloch
St. Tammany bureau
The Times-Picayune

A New Orleans nonprofit corporation is seeking approval to build a residential and commercial development that would cater to adults with developmental disabilities on 100 acres in Abita Springs.

If it receives a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers and a zoning change from the Abita Springs Board of Aldermen, St. Andrew's Village Inc. could break ground late this year and be completed by late 2010, said Donna S. Breaux, the corporation's executive director.

The corporation is trying to raise \$30 million for the project, which would be mainly for adults with developmental disabilities, she said. The village would employ at least 100 full-time staff members.

Breaux said the corporation has just begun a capital campaign and has raised about \$1.5 million so far.

The project needs the approval of the Army Corps of Engineers, she said, because about half the 100-acre site is designated as wetlands. Breaux said the wetlands would not be developed, but would remain in their natural state for nature walks and education on coastal erosion and restoration. She said she hopes to have the needed permits by this summer.

St. Andrew's Village touts itself as a "faith-based village community where adults with special needs can live, work, worship and socialize."

The corporation hired Holly & Smith Architects of Hammond to develop the site plans. The plans were informally presented to the Abita Springs Board of Aldermen at its monthly meeting on Tuesday.

The project must go before the town's Planning and Zoning Commission for its recommendation, and then to the Board of Aldermen for a zoning change to planned-unit development, Mayor Louis Fitzmorris said.

At the Tuesday board meeting, the mayor and aldermen expressed their full support.

"We are really proud to support this unique development," Fitzmorris said. Alderwoman Sheri Sable-Campbell added that it would allow "some people who never had the opportunity to live alone to have that opportunity."

"I really think Abita is the perfect community for you all," she said.

The plan is to break ground late this year, with four village homes, Breaux said. Each home would house three developmentally disabled adults and one staff member, who would help take care of them. Each resident would have a bedroom and bathroom, and each home would include a living room, laundry area and kitchen, she said.

The community would also include a clinic, an athletic facility, a chapel, stores, a restaurant, and a place to facilitate possible employment and interaction with the residents of Abita Springs, according to the village's site plan and literature.

The idea is to foster "independence and self-determination" among the residences and create "meaningful employment with dignity and purpose," according to the literature.

The residents, referred to as "villagers," would be encouraged to raise and sell plants, work in the facility's restaurant and retail stores, and provide services for local business, Breaux said.

Preliminary sketches of the development call for 19 homes for developmentally disabled adults, allowing for 57 disabled adults and 19 live-in support staff. A larger "neighborhood development" also would eventually be built outside of the main center, creating homes that could be leased by the disabled adults' family members or others.

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More information on the project is available at www.saintandrewsvillage.org.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

TO JOIN OR CONTRIBUTE: \$25 per individual, \$150 per family organization, or \$200 per provider/professional organization. Extra donations are welcome!

You may pay by check or credit card
VOR (Voice of the Retarded)
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