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IRRC

Kathy Cooper

**From:** drevets1085@comcast.net  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 11, 2016 4:28 PM  
**To:** IRRC  
**Subject:** Proposed plan by ODP for consolidated waivers and closing of pre-vocational training facilities

2016 DEC 12 AM 9: 22

Dear IRRC,

We are writing to express serious concern about the planned phase out of sheltered workshops for the developmentally disabled, as part of the Pennsylvania Statewide Transition Plan proposed by The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) of The State Department of Human Services. The goal behind this plan involves the desire to transition disabled individuals to a community based, integrated model, and away from a segregated work setting model (i.e., sheltered workshop). While this plan appears to be motivated by good intentions, it does not appear to have been tested in careful piloting within PA, and a plethora of negative results from other states that have already implemented such plans suggests the ODP's plan is likely to harm rather than help many individuals with developmental disabilities.

It is crucial, therefore, that the ODP ensures that sheltered workshops are kept open in PA as long as it takes to place all of their current participants into the promised, but presently only conceptualized, jobs in the mainstream workforce. The ODP has an obligation to provide continuity of service to these individuals and their families, and their lives must not be placed in upheaval by a plan that remains unproven. In addition, for those individuals for whom integrated community-based, supported employment placements fail, they must be allowed to return to sheltered workshops.

Notably, evidence from Michigan and other states where sheltered workshops were closed do not support the idea that people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (ID/DD) who need and want employment will be able to find jobs when the only option is "supported employment" (i.e., within community-based, integrated opportunities) (<http://theddnewsblog.blogspot.com/2016/01/q-does-closing-sheltered-workshops.html?m=1>). In Washington, after the State required that all publicly-funded resources for persons with ID/DD be limited "to finding and keeping paid employment in the real world as opposed to sheltered workshops", **only 17% of individuals with severe disabilities were able to obtain work**. Similarly, after Maine closed sheltered workshops in 2008, a case study on the transition's consequences showed that **2/3rds of those previously employed were no longer employed**, and those who were employed were earned less per week because of the reduction in the number of hours worked. Moreover, after the passage of the law, non-work placements increased from 550 to 3,178, and employment data for people with intellectual disabilities showed an average of only 12 hours worked per week in 2011, the lowest in the nation. Finally, in Vermont the percentage of people with ID/DD in supported employment decreased after mandating the closure of its sheltered workshops in 2002, and by 2011 had dropped to only 35%. In many of the affected families in these states, a parent or relative needed to leave the workforce in order to care for their disabled family member after they had been displaced from a sheltered workshop.

Family members, psychologists and social workers with experience in caring for individuals with ID/DD predicted these poor outcomes. The failure of community work opportunities for many individuals with ID/DD is that they are limited to the competitive workplace in which few jobs are available or suitable for individuals with severe cognitive impairment. Moreover, when individuals with ID/DD enter community-based job opportunities, they often are unable to maintain their new jobs. Very commonly these individuals have difficulties with emotion regulation, impulse control, and social

skills, and many also have difficulty communicating or using the bathroom. Thus they often manifest behaviors viewed as problematical in the competitive workplace, where employers are concerned about attracting, retaining and attending to customers. Furthermore, many individuals with ID/DD require more intensive supervision than supervisors in the competitive workplace are able to provide. All of these factors conspire to shorten the time over which individuals with ID/DD are able to retain employment in community-based, supported work settings.

In contrast, the facility-based work programs (sheltered workshops) that the ODP seeks to close are specialized to serve people with more severe disabilities, and often offer other services and social opportunities not available elsewhere. For example, our developmentally disabled adult son has been thriving in a facility based program, Associated Production Services, Inc. (APS), which consists of four productive, pre-vocational training facilities that employ 573 developmentally disabled adults in Bucks, Northampton and Philadelphia Counties. He and the disabled co-workers with whom he works already had tried and failed a variety of community based employment options prior to obtaining jobs at APS. Within the APS program he and his coworkers have been able to consistently participate in daily, constructive, work in a supportive and protected environment that we have not found anywhere else in the local community. APS provides the supervision and safety they need as well as a job they are capable of doing. The regular work at APS has given our son a sense of purpose, and has helped him build self-esteem and discipline. He has shown continued growth and maturation at APS. He loves going to work every day and is proud of his paycheck. Crucially, APS also provides daily opportunities for our son to interact socially and to make friends with both disabled and non-disabled workers.

Notably, while the ODP states that their plan is aimed at promoting safety, self-confidence, quality of life, friends and choice, all of these goals currently are being met at APS. If this transition plan is not changed to allow pre-vocational training centers such as APS to continue their valuable role, the ODP essentially will be taking away from these disabled adults the ability to achieve the very goals they claim to be promoting (since most of these individuals have already failed in community-based programs like that envisioned by the ODP). It is therefore crucial that the PA Transition Plan allow for sheltered workshops to remain a viable option.

The current system is outstanding for many families, because it evolved over time with many very dedicated and well-trained individuals pitching in to shape and guide for each disabled person a viable path into their optimal environment. For many, like our son and his APS co-workers, the sheltered workplace has been and will remain the optimal system. A chief role of government is to provide care for persons who are unable to care for themselves. We urge you not to take away this opportunity for the thousands of Pennsylvanians with DI/DD whose only opportunities for maintaining constructive employment will prove to be sheltered workshop type environments.

Sincerely,

Wayne Drevets, M.D.

Michele Drevets, R.N.