



Green Mountain Self-Advocates
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My name is Karen Topper. I live in Barre. I am a disability justice advocate. I do not have a legal background. Although I completely agree with the testimony you heard from the lawyers who work for the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council and the Disability Law Project.

I am 68 and I have been supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities my whole life. I started volunteering at a state institution in Connecticut when I was 15.

When new institutions open, people often say that they will be great places for people with disabilities. They will get the specialized treatment and therapy they need. But one way or another, my experience is that institutional settings end up hurting people with disabilities. It's a vicious Cycle. A Cycle of Institutions. A Cycle of segregation. Last April, the history of Brandon Training School was reviewed by the Vermont Legislature when you passed your resolution to apologize for state-sanctioned eugenics policies. And last October Seven Days published an expose documenting the abuse that occurred at Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. So here we are again. Institutions get opened, closed, remade, and opened again... and again.

I work for Green Mountain Self-Advocates. We support 20 local peer support groups with more than 600 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities speaking up for themselves as individuals and as part of their groups.

Green Mountain Self-Advocates opposes S.192. We do not support the building of a forensic facility for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Testimony provided by the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council stated that the Agency of Human Services estimated it would cost about \$3,400 for one person to be placed in a forensic unit each day. That means in one year, it's over \$1,240,000 for just one person - more than a million dollars each year for each placement. Please do not spend \$3,400 a day to place a person with an intellectual disability in your forensic unit. The money is better spent on developing community-based resources.

DAIL's lawyer, Stuart Schurr, facilitated the summer work group on the forensic unit. He kept saying that a placement would be temporary. And at the same time, we heard how some community providers are facing workforce issues and lack the capacity to serve some individuals committed under Act 248 who have intense needs. GMSA is very worried that if people with intellectual disabilities are put in a forensic facility, they might end up staying there for a long time because there isn't a better place for them to go. How can the forensic unit be a temporary placement if there is nowhere for people to go when it is time for them to leave?

One idea that DAIL hasn't tried yet, at least as far as we know, is for the state to ask for proposals (RFP) to develop a new therapeutic residential program in the community. This program would be designed to support people under Act 248 who have intense needs. DAIL should look into what other states like North Carolina and Indiana are doing to provide community-based supports for people with intellectual disabilities who also have mental health problems and are forensically involved. There are programs in these states that support people in their communities, including individuals who might try to leave their homes without permission.

We have supported people for 31 years without an institution. We want safe community-based options. It is possible to meet the safety concerns for people with disabilities and the community at large. Lately, the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors' Forensic Division has been focusing on individuals with IDD. Advocacy groups like The Arc have been working on ways to improve service systems and address the specific needs of this population. They've even set up a National Center on Criminal Justice and Disability for this purpose.

Thank you for supporting community-based options for all people with intellectual disabilities.