

June 1, 2014

Shelley Dill

Tulsa, OK 74137

To The Sunset Advisory Commission:

I am writing in reference to the Sunset Commission Analysis of the State Schools for Mental Health and Mental Retardation of the State of Texas. As the sister and guardian of John Michael Massad, a resident of Lufkin State Supported Living Center, I am deeply concerned about the suggestion that these individuals would be better served in group homes in the community. My brother has lived at LSS for 46 + years, and this is his home. He is severely handicapped and requires a multitude of professionals, who are educated, trained, and able to care for his extremely demanding needs.

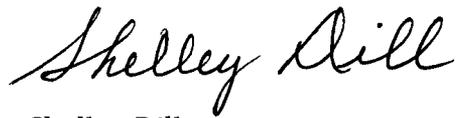
The pressure being put on families to move their loved ones into a community without ample care is frightening and without merit. For most of them, this would be a critical mistake, and for some would be a death sentence. My siblings and I visited group homes at the urging of the DADS representative, and were appalled at the lack of supervision, safety standards, skilled staff, and overall care provided at such places. Many of these group home companies are "for profit" and merely require that their staff obtain a GED. The conditions we observed at two different homes were disturbing, including poor supervision, safety hazards, and non-handicap accessible. There may be other group homes that offer adequate care for higher functioning individuals, but they are not the viable answer for those like our brother, John. At LSS he has access to skilled nurses who administer medications, dieticians who prepare a soft diet, an infirmary, a psychologist, available dentists and doctors, trained 24 hour staff members on the dorm, safety features throughout the campus, and a system of checks and balances to ensure that each resident is treated properly.

I realize that the states are looking for ways to reduce spending, but to do so at the expense of those who are most in need of our care would be a tragedy. Many individuals at LSS are incapable of performing basic activities such as walking alone, bathing, eating, or dressing without assistance. These state schools have done an excellent job of extending the lives of loved ones by educating their staff and hiring the most compassionate professionals to care for the least among us.

Please consider visiting the individual dorms at some of these schools and witness for yourselves the level of personal and professional attention required to care for the severely mentally handicapped. They are truly doing God's work, and our loved ones are alive and well because of them. Our handicapped citizens should be a top priority, not a lower one. These types of issues cannot and should not be dollar denominated.

Many thanks for your thoughtful consideration in this very crucial matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelley Dill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shelley Dill

Cc: Governor Rick Perry
Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
Texas Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Texas House of Representatives Human Services Committee
Lufkin State Supported Living Center