

My name is Nancy Ward. I am the mother and legal guardian of Dianne Ward. Dianne has profound mental retardation, cerebral palsy, mobility impaired, limited vision, no speech and many medical problems. She functions like a 16 month old baby and has an 8 IQ.

Dianne lived at the Fort Worth State School until it closed and she now lives at the Denton State Supported Living Center. (DSSLC)

I am very concerned about the creation of the "Closure Commission" recommended by the Sunset staff. The "Task Force" that was appointed in the 1990's to study the 13 state schools recommended the closure of Travis SS and Mexia SS.

Suddenly, we were told that Ft Worth SS was going to be closed instead of Mexia SS.

The state had spent a large amount of money for the task force to visit and evaluate all 13 state schools. To then have their recommendation rejected made no sense to the families affected.

Ft Worth SS was the newest school. It was well designed to serve people with mental and physical disabilities. There were no steps or stairs on the entire campus. Wheel chairs and people on crutches could go anywhere on the campus with no problems.

At the time of the Ft Worth SS closure, the property and buildings were appraised at 26 million, but was given to the county for 1 million dollars.

The 200 acres of land the school was built on was donated by the Sid Richardson and Amon Carter Foundations. They also donated a 1 million dollar Olympic size, hydrotherapy swimming pool. These Foundations felt betrayed by the state when Texas closed this much need facility.

Ft Worth SS was not closed to settle the Lelsz Lawsuit as was stated in the Sunset Commission Report. Judge Barefoot Sanders did not rule to close any state school. At the last Lelsz hearing, Judge Sanders asked Ann Utley, the board chair of TDMHMR, if TDMHMR was going to continue supporting the state schools and she replied "yes".

The Texas Legislature lost control to the appointed "Task Force" and were unable to stop the closure of Ft Worth SS, even though MANY were against the closure.

The closure was a huge loss to the state and the employees who lost jobs, their homes and cars. Many were forced go on welfare.

Many of the residents who were evicted from their homes of many years and placed into the "community" had serious problems and were returned back to a state school.

I am very concerned about the people moving to group homes who have problems chewing and swallowing their food. Out of 11 SSLC's reporting, there are 2,035 residents who require a modified diet. This means they must have chopped, ground or pureed food. They must continue to have this modified diet when they are moved to a group home or they will choke or aspirate food into their lungs.

Many residents of SSLC's have severe seizures and need specialized care immediately. My daughter has had 3 severe seizures this year where she turned blue and stopped breathing. Because the well trained staff immediately started treating her, she is alive today. They also were able to dial a number to get immediate help from all over the campus at DSSLC.

I have been a volunteer in state schools since 1955 and have more than 35,000 hours of volunteer work. I have seen many positive changes and they continue to improve every day.

For Dianne, the Denton State Supported Living Center is the most cost effective, most appropriate, least restrictive and most protective setting for her.

Please preserve the State Supported Living Centers for those who live in them today and for those who will need them in the future.

Thank you,

Nancy Ward