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December 21, 2015

Commissioner Morna A. Murray, J.D.  
Department of Developmental Services  
460 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Call for Public Recommendations—Southbury Training School

Dear Commissioner Murray:

Since 1987, Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. has provided legal representation and advocacy services on behalf of several thousand residents of Connecticut who have developmental and intellectual disability. As part of a grant we receive from the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons With Disabilities, Attorneys Esther Rada and I presently advocate for 38 class members of the Messier Settlement Agreement, who are either former residents or present residents of Southbury Training School. In addition, I am also Attorney of record for 19 class members at Southbury Probate Court.

**Recommendation 1:** There should be a planned, timed process to close Southbury Training School.

**Justification:** Throughout the years, our advocacy has recognized certain factors to be of special importance in predicting an adequate quality of life for individuals with intellectual disability. One of the primary factors is consistency of care and programming: that a person can depend on certainty within his or her environment and life. We all want this, and although it is not always possible for anyone to achieve, it is especially difficult for individuals with intellectual disability who find themselves living in an institutional setting with declining population. Residents and family members are needlessly stressed as they find themselves unable to adequately plan for their future.

Apart from the personal stress to individuals and family members, the aging facilities of STS, along with declining population, cause a tremendous per diem expense to the state to support each resident in an institutional setting. To ameliorate this, cottages are closed and the census of the remaining cottages increase accordingly. Although our philosophical and legal mandates require that we advocate for a least restrictive setting for our clients, these circumstances prevent this outcome from occurring in any realistic manner. In some cases, grown and aging adults are living in bedrooms with two or

three other individuals. The confusion and noise increase. Privacy can never be assured.

As stated above, during the past several years, the upheaval at Southbury Training School (STS), as the population declines and buildings are closed, renovated and re-opened to accommodate this decline, has caused extreme stress and uncertainty in the lives of folks who require certainty and stability even more than the general population. Residents are very aware of the changes, as roommates and staff are added and leave. Consistency of care and stability are severely compromised. Residents watch lifelong peers move out of Southbury and they watch staff change residences, as clients shift from one cottage to another.

Individuals deserve to know that their life circumstances are relatively stable and that they can reasonably plan for the future. It is grossly unjust to allow this fragile, aging population to face such an uncertain, chaotic and disruptive future. Although guardians have the election to place in the community, the uncertainty of the status of STS has caused continued confusion as to what is the best course for vulnerable loved ones. People continue to fear the unknown and cling to an aging, inadequate system.

**Recommendation 2:** Steps should be taken to ensure personal dignity be continued as the population at STS declines.

**Justification:** Steps should be taken to ensure quiet, peaceful settings while STS continues to slowly decline in population and available services. Although consolidation occurs, costs continue to rise while the loss of personal dignity and privacy increase. Individuals, in their aging years, deserve better. Our vulnerable clients deserve to spend their remaining years in a home, where privacy can be better assured and their community can be appropriately accessed.

Very truly yours,

Sandra A. Trionfini

Esther A. Rada