

Honorable Carol Liu
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Honorable Jim Beall
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SUBJECT: Oversight of California's Regional Centers □ Senate Committee on Human Services and Assembly Committee on Human Services □ 4 November 2010

Dear Senator Liu and Assemblyman Beall:

I was fortunate to be able to attend the Oversight Hearing on transparency and best practices for California's Regional Centers on 4 November 2010. Due to time constraints at the hearing I did not make a personal presentation and would like to share with you my reflection on the matters discussed.

I am a parent of a young woman Rachel (age 27 years) who has been a recipient of San Gabriel Pomona Regional Center services since infancy. Her condition known as Alfi's syndrome is a rare chromosomal aberration. Without the early stimulation program provided by San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center and subsequent developmental assistance my daughter would not be where she is today. Her program is a win-win for her and the taxpayers. San Gabriel Pomona Regional Center has always operated with professional and compassionate consistency. And for that we are very grateful. She will unfortunately never be able to function without close supervision due to her overall condition and medical needs but she is developing skills along with self-esteem, confidence and a sense of well being for her eventual independence. We are older parents and her care after we are gone is of grave concern to us.

As I listened to the summary statement of the State Auditor and read through their report, it was clear that there is considerable dissonance and tension between the detailed examination of compliance of six regional centers and the needs of their clients. In fact, it does not appear that regional center clients were involved in the audit process. The State Auditor's Office appears to paint a very negative perspective by generalizing their findings for all the regional centers after stating their sample was of six regional centers out of twenty-one. I do recognize that the auditor was mandated to perform the audit.

Had the report stated a more uniform and transparent procurement and rate-setting process would improve the cost-effectiveness of the six regional centers studied, I would have accepted this as a factual statement and not a generalization. It is unfair to paint all Regional Centers with the same brush. Perhaps this is only my interpretation but I speak from a background of thirty years of administrative management experience as a civil servant for Los Angeles County.

The level of cooperation between the State Auditor, DDS and the six Regional Centers is laudable and clearly demonstrates that the parties involved are dedicated to resolving their differences. The mantra of transparency and cost effectiveness is a worthy one.

As a parent I am grateful that we have the Lanterman Act and I also realize that Regional Center funding is out of a pool of limited resources. However more regulations and controls are not the answer. The system is already very complicated. Regional Centers need flexibility at the local level and indeed the Lanterman Act empowers its volunteer Board members to represent the needs of their respective communities as pointed out in the testimony of Bob Baldo, the executive director of ARCA. Each of the clients is an individual with different needs. To treat them as if "one size fits all," is to ignore this reality. Moreover the supple phrase "least costly" looks great on paper but ignores the human reality and the complexities of trying to provide the services needed. I would generalize that no one is expecting gold plated service but the "low bid" criterion can lead to serious deficiencies in the level of service. We are after all dealing with human clients and not cargo or material supplies.

I will close with a brief story about President Jimmy Carter. When he graduated from the Naval Academy, he was standing in formation and Admiral Rickover was briefly interviewing each graduate. Rickover asked Carter, "Did you do your best?" Carter replied, " I don't think I did my best, Sir." Rickover responded, "Why not?" and walked on. Each day when I help my daughter Rachel, I ask myself this same question.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Denis E. McGrath, Ph.D.