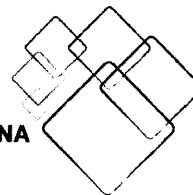


DISABILITY RIGHTS NORTH CAROLINA

Champions for Equality and Justice



AN OPEN LETTER

November 22, 2011

The Honorable Beverly E. Perdue
Office of the Governor
Constituent Services Office
116 W. Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27603

Dear Governor Perdue:

North Carolina is at a difficult and potentially expensive crossroads in delivering services to people with disabilities. As Governor, you must choose which road to take. You can provide courageous leadership and negotiate a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice, leading North Carolina in a bold new direction which complies with federal law. An agreement will make the promise of *Olmstead* a reality in our state – the opportunity for people with mental health and other disabilities to live and participate in our communities with adequate and appropriate supports. The alternative, allowing the U.S. Department of Justice to sue our state in order to enforce federal law, will divert precious resources from service provision to protracted litigation and effectively relinquish control to a special master.

The odds are not in the state's favor on this issue. Recognizing the U.S. Supreme Court's mandate set forth in *Olmstead*, a decade and more of reports commissioned by the North Carolina General Assembly have highlighted North Carolina's failure to provide our citizens with mental health disabilities a real chance for recovery with dignity. Some of these reports provided recommendations on how North Carolina can achieve the requirements of *Olmstead*. We know what to do, yet fail to do it.

What people with mental health disabilities want and need – and what the law requires – are options enabling recovery for meaningful futures. This benefits not only the individuals with mental health disabilities but helps to ensure that every North Carolina citizen will be enriched with healthy, productive neighbors.

To quote South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley (R) in her response to a 2011 NAMI report, "We've got to start dealing with the problem....We have to prioritize it because

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and Advocacy System*

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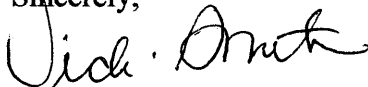
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what's happening now is these victims of mental illness are ending up in jail or in the hospital, and what they really need is treatment. These are people who can function on a day-to-day basis if they just get the services they need And by not giving them the treatment they need, it's only costing taxpayers more money later."

On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and clients of the State's Protection and Advocacy system, I urge you to continue negotiating with the U.S. Department of Justice. Reach a just resolution regarding the options and choices available to North Carolinians living with severe and persistent mental illness and spare the state's resources from drawn-out litigation that will surely result in an order directing North Carolina to do what we can achieve right now through settlement negotiations. Our communities are strengthened by inclusion of people with disabilities, especially the people who are finally provided with the opportunity and support to lead meaningful and participatory lives in North Carolina. We hope North Carolina embraces the challenge. With your leadership the future can be bright.

Sincerely,

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

Vicki Smith
Executive Director