

LOUISIANA CITIZENS FOR ACTION NOW

Advocating for Louisiana Citizens with Developmental Disabilities

Write to Governor Jindal Today October 31, 2008

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ACTION ALERT (Final Reminder)

1. Write to Governor Jindal about the recently reported abuse that occurred to residents in Pinecrest Developmental Center over the last year and a half. See **Sample Letter below** that you can personalize and **read on for background information** on this horrible incident.
2. If you haven't already, **please confirm your action by replying to this email.** Thanks to those who have already done so.

You can email the Governor using the link below. Or your letter can be mailed to him at P.O. Box 94004, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9004. Or you can fax a letter to him at 225-342-7099.

Email Governor Jindal

http://www.gov.la.gov/index.cfm?md=form&tmp=email_governor

Sample Letter to Governor Jindal

Dear Governor Jindal: The recent discovery of multiple and long lasting cases of abuse of residents with developmental disabilities at the Pinecrest Developmental Center highlight the issues inherent in the current system that segregates and isolates individuals from living in their community.

I know you agree it is unacceptable that these individuals are treated with abuse and neglect. It is particularly disturbing that the state is willing to expend on average \$176,000 a year to have these citizens subjected to this abuse. These individuals could live in their communities and have neighbors, friends, and relatives provide better oversight of their supports and care that is not available in these institutions.

Sample Letter to Governor Jindal (continued)

As a (*Parent of a child with developmental disabilities / self-advocate with developmental disabilities / advocate*) I appreciate the leadership Kathy Kliebert is providing in moving OCDD into the direction of increased community-based services. The recent allocation of New Opportunities Waiver slots in the last two (2) legislative sessions is the only real safe guard to guarantee that people have options to live in the community and not be subjected to being imprisoned in these ineffective costly segregated institutions.

While you will certainly have to address the problems of lack of appropriate training, oversight, reporting and care in the developmental centers, these approaches will prove once again to be merely short term and superficial solutions. I implore you to support the current direction of OCDD and develop an action plan that expedites the closure of developmental centers in Louisiana.

What Happened at Pinecrest Developmental Center

Below is a link to the article in the Alexandria Town Talk newspaper that reported the abuse noted above. I must warn you that the article is very disturbing and difficult to read. In fact, I began to feel ill when reading it.

Sadly, this is not the first time such abuse has occurred. It is time for advocates to express their outrage that this continues, and will continue unless the state reforms it system to eliminate service models that segregate and isolate individuals with disabilities from their communities and those who can and will ensure service providers deliver quality and caring supports.

Article About Abuse at Pinecrest (see below)

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POWERED BY YOU AND THE TOWN TALK

5 Pinecrest employees arrested in abuse probe

BY TOM BONNETTE - TBONNETTE@THETOWNTALK.COM - OCTOBER 22, 2008

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Five caregivers at the Pinecrest Supports and Services Center in Pineville have been arrested in connection with what state officials called "truly disturbing" behavior toward patients.

The five face a total of 40 charges, including multiple counts of cruelty to the infirm, according to the Rapides Parish Sheriff's Office.

Deputies say patients were beaten with hand weights and were given excessive amounts of prune juice to cause uncontrollable bowel movements. Also, bleach was placed on a patient's open wound, authorities said.

"It's some pretty bad stuff that's been going on," said Sheriff's Assistant Chief Deputy Herman Walters.

Police said those arrested and their charges are:

- Clara Harrell, 52, of 119 Cedar Lane, Pineville, 17 counts of cruelty to the infirm and three counts of intimidation of a witness.
- Brenda Prater, 45, of 426 Martin Luther King Drive, Cottonport, 14 counts of cruelty to the infirm.
- Renetha Cheatam, 26, of 2607 Wise St., Alexandria, one count of cruelty to the infirm and two counts of intimidation of a witness.
- John Simon, 44, of 2113 Crepe Myrtle Drive, Pineville, one count of cruelty to the infirm and one count of aggravated assault.
- Windell Smith, 54, of 4123 Seventh St., Alexandria, one count of cruelty to the infirm.

All five have posted bond and have been released from jail, authorities said.

Sheriff's officials say the five workers, who Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals officials described as "residential service specialists," were arrested after a month-long investigation prompted by complaints from employees at the hospital, which cares for severely mentally challenged.

Walters said the abuse detectives uncovered at the hospital is extensive and has been happening for some time.

"There were probably seven or eight (patients) who were abused for a good length of time," Walters said. "We are talking about as much as a year or a year and a half."



Renetha Cheatam



Clara Harrell



Johnny Simon

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According to sheriff's reports, employees who saw the abuses were threatened with the loss of their jobs if they reported them to authorities, Walters said.

An e-mail statement from Alan Levine, DHH secretary, called the reported abuses "truly disturbing."

"This behavior from any caretaker entrusted with protecting our most vulnerable citizens is shameful and receives our strongest condemnation," Levine wrote. "We have been working diligently with law enforcement to ensure these reports were investigated and our citizens protected."

Levine said the state has an aggressive system in place to receive reports and fully investigate them, and he is thankful other hospital employees notified law enforcement.

J.T. Lang, deputy chief of staff for DHH, said caregivers at the hospital are vetted before they are hired in a process that includes criminal background checks.

Walters said the investigation is ongoing, and more arrests could be made.

"You never know where something its going until you break the ice," he said. "You never know, but we shall see."



Windell Smith

In Your Voice

READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY

Newest first



whatiknow2 wrote:

celtics1 needs to get the fact strait. Lets all just pray that those in this will do the Godly thing and take care of the people they are entrusted to provide support to.

10/23/2008 8:43:51 PM

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celtics1 wrote:

Replying to celtics1:

The State is trying to get rid of places like Pincrest. Its an abuse of money. The State wants the disabled to live in their own apt. house, whatever. But it is in the process. Pincrest has lost half their patients from two years ago. It was just bad to heard all disabled a instatation.

I'm sorry herd.

10/23/2008 5:07:52 PM

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celtics1 wrote:

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10/23/2008 5:06:23 PM

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ebonyeyes42 wrote:

why did they let it go on for a whole year before anything was done? maybe they should be arrested too for knowing and not reportinig immediately.isn't the first step is removing the client from danger? when abuse is being done?

10/23/2008 11:43:06 AM

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whatiknow2 wrote:

HELLO DOJ,
WELCOME BACK TO PINECREST, WE HAVE BEEN DOING NOTHING SINCE YOU LAST LEFT US. OUR CLIENT RIGHTS OFFICIER HAS BEEN SITTING ON INVESTIGATION AND ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN OUT TO LUNCH, DRINKING COFFEE, AND SOME OF OUR TOP DOGS HAVE BEEN ADVISING OTHER FACILITIES HOW TO GET RID OF DOJ. SO COME ON DOWN!!!! NOW MAYBE THE STATE CAN PAY OUR CURRENT EMPLOYEES EXTRA MONEY TO ADVISE US AGAIN.

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Any Questions?

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If there are any questions about the information in this email contact LaCAN's Coordinator by replying to this email, or calling the toll free number listed below.

**Contact Information**

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email: list@lacanadvocates.org
phone: 1-800-450-8108
web: <http://www.lacanadvocates.org>

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