

Good afternoon. My name is Gail Beckham and I reside in Colstrip, Montana. I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak with you to share my family's experience and why I am opposed to closing the Montana Developmental Center (M.D.C.).

I know from experience that M.D.C. works to stabilize and treat people with serious disabilities and behavioral issues.

My granddaughter Kayla is 19 years old and was diagnosed with Williams Syndrome at age 2. She has impaired cognitive skills and physical limitations and is bipolar. She attended public schools in special education and my daughter told me that is the only place where she received both occupational and physical therapy. DEAP provided an aid for a maximum of 10 hours a week. She eventually began receiving home health care, but only for 1 to ½ hours a day. It also depended on whether or not staff was available. Their focus was more on teaching my granddaughter good hygiene, prepare snacks/meals and helping her do her laundry. My daughter would tell you that she was extremely grateful for any assistance but the home health care was more respite care or babysitting, which was also needed, but it simply was not addressing the serious issues my granddaughter dealt with 24/7.

My daughter kept her in the family home until the overall effects on the family became overwhelming. My granddaughter threatened suicide and has had tremendous anxiety and angry outbursts. By approximately age 16 she was on 5-6 medications a day and has spent time at Acadia, a group home in Billings and a group home in Terry. Due to the lack of services available to my granddaughter at that time my daughter was forced to send her to the Texas Neuro Rehab and the Cottonwood Treatment Center in Salt Lake. It then became impossible for our family to even visit Kayla due to the expense. None of these placements really met her needs, but often added to her anxiety and behavioral issues. The fact that her family was not able to visit her was devastating.

She also received mental health services through the AWARE program, but they did not provide any other services like those covered by DEAP.

My granddaughter resided at the Montana Developmental Center for 1 ½ years and made significant progress. M.D.C. monitored and managed her medications reducing them to 2 a day. M.D.C. staff worked diligently and compassionately with my granddaughter and she made great progress in managing her anxieties and adapting better social skills. She is more focused and carries on a more sensible adult-like conversation, an indication of how she grew and advanced while at M.D.C.

My granddaughter currently resides at a Montana group home. She has her first job, first checking account and as normal an adult life as she can considering her challenges and limitations. M.D.C. made that possible. It was so important that my granddaughter be in a safe structured environment with a consistent routine and a staff that that was compassionate and committed to preparing my granddaughter for a more productive life. MDC staff members accompanied us to the group home and stayed a couple of nights to help her make the transition successfully.

Montana's special needs children and adults deserve the best of opportunities available. We should not be cutting services provided at M.D.C., we should be increasing them. Please vote against closing M.D.C.

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