

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I am Anna Studencki from Great Falls, Montana.

I appear today in opposition to Senate Bill 411.

Not every disabled person can be served in the community.

In Aug. 2012, The Missoulian reported Larry Noonan, chief executive officer of Aware, Inc., as saying, "There are always people on the cusp of not making it in our program. There needs to be a place for them to go."

The proponents of closing MDC are naive.

1. They assume group homes are not understaffed. MDC has not been able to place persons who are ready to go back to the community. Providers have cited understaffing as a reason for not taking them.
2. They assume that clients would be safe in group homes whereas they are not at MDC. A few years back in Great Falls, a client walked away from a group home and he had to be retrieved. (In Illinois 2 clients were beaten to death at a state licensed group home - one, because he took a cookie.)
3. They assume the public would be safe if MDC is closed. In Nov. 2011 a client with rage issues got loose from a QLC group home in Great Falls and smashed all the windows out of a van using a crowbar.
4. Individuals are involuntarily committed by a court to MDC because a judge has determined that they are a danger to the community or to themselves. SB411 would mandate their return to the community.

In both 2013 and 2014, half of the commitments to MDC were new and half were re-commitments. Recommitments include those not finished with treatment, those "not making it in the community" and those whom providers (Aware and others) would not take or take back.

Looking at this data, we cannot reduce the population of MDC by half as Disability Rights and Aware so confidently stated in recent testimony.

Furthermore, the 50 available slots are not enough, since there are families desperately waiting for emergency placement of loved ones to MDC.

MDC is in a beautiful location. Its campus has all the services needed in one place. This includes individual bedrooms, a gym, a small therapy pool, a library, classrooms, nursing staff, behaviorists, speech therapy, physical therapy, a kitchen which produces nutritious meals and even a church.

Why should we waste taxpayer money to build new facilities as suggested by Disability Rights in their report of Feb. 6, 2015?

My autistic daughter was placed at MDC by emergency court order because she was a danger to herself. If she had not been placed there, she would be dead by now.

After graduating from Great Falls High, my daughter was denied services by all community providers. After three years at home, she started running out of the house alone. After locks were installed, she squeezed out of windows. She ran across busy streets without looking. In the car she vaulted into the front seat and tried to open the front door at city and highway speeds.

My daughter also tried to enter strangers homes uninvited. A terrified homeowner with a weapon could have shot her.

I speak with MDC staff every week. There are individuals who have worked there many years because they love the work. Even when hurt by clients, they stay on the job.

Many individuals have been well served at MDC. We have visited our daughter 7 times; she has not wanted to leave with us.