

Families: Block centers' closure

Deal would close 4 of 5 Va. centers for those with intellectual disabilities

BY RAY REED

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Relatives of people who live in the five Virginia training centers affected by a proposed settlement between Virginia and the U.S. Department of Justice are asking a court to block the settlement or let them participate in it.

Legal papers, filed by a Pennsylvania law firm Friday on behalf of the training-center residents' families and guardians, contend the settlement would violate the families' and guardians' rights and harm their relatives who live in the training centers.

The families are seeking a legal voice in the outcome of the case.

Martha Bryant, whose two teenage sons live at Central Virginia Training Center in Madison Heights, said she hoped the court filing would lead to one of the training centers being kept open.

Having just one training center could preserve a skilled-care level of service for people with profound intellectual disabilities, she said.

"I hope the judge will intervene for families and allow individual considerations," Bryant said.

"Right now, the way the settlement reads, they have overruled the opinions of the professionals (who provide skilled care) and the families," Bryant said.

The Justice Department lawsuit, along with a settlement proposed by Virginia, was filed Jan. 26 in U.S. District Court in Richmond.

The settlement, which is awaiting the court's review, would close four of Virginia's five training centers for people with intellectual disabilities. CVTC would be shut down by 2020. The fifth training center, in Chesapeake, is expected to be downsized to accommodate 75 residents at a time for short-term stays up to 30 days.

Peter Kinzler, whose son is a resident at Northern Virginia Training Center, said, "The families' voice should matter most, yet neither the Justice Department nor the commonwealth sought our input with regard to the specific terms of the agreement."

Ray Reed writes for The News & Advance of Lynchburg.



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