

December 3, 2007
Budget Testimony for People First of Missouri

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Good Afternoon my name is Cathy Enfield. I am from Independence, MO. I am here today representing People First of Missouri which is the only Developmental Disability advocacy group in the state that is run entirely by people with developmental disabilities. We appreciate this opportunity to speak to you about issues that are important to us.

Our top priorities are those areas that support and enhance family resources for community supports for individuals receiving services through DMH. The development and expansion of opportunities that allows people to live and participate in the community is very important to People First of Missouri. The size of the existing waiting list of persons with disabilities that are in need of services and the added need for services for those individuals transitioning from Habilitation Centers to the community are examples of areas that impact our need for enhanced community support funding. The gap in starting pay between direct care staff working in the community and those employed in institutional settings needs to be addressed. Community support services are seriously impaired because many good direct care staff simply cannot survive on the wages currently being paid.

People First of Missouri continues its strong support of closing all state institutions and transitioning those individuals into community living settings along with many individuals who have been inappropriately placed in nursing homes.

Budget expenditures in Missouri for issues involving people with disabilities have historically been biased toward institutional funding. This bias has limited funding for community supports which in turn has limited the opportunities for people with disabilities to develop and lead meaningful lives as equal members of our society. This institutional bias has resulted in restrictions on the basic civil rights of people with disabilities that unfairly limit their opportunities to control their own lives. People First of Missouri asks that you make every possible effort to diversify and expand programs and practices that enable people with disabilities to live in the community with the opportunity to make meaningful decisions about how their services are delivered and how their own funding is spent.

We ask that you also support funding for programs and practices that enable people with disabilities to be recognized and accepted not by the name of their disability but simply as people. We would like to suggest that a good first step in this direction would be to stop using the words "Mental Retardation" in the name of the Division of MRDD and simply call it "The Division of Developmental Disabilities".

Thank you.

