



January 16, 2008

Honorable Missouri State Legislators,

I urge your support of Senate Bill 756 and House Bill 1627, which call for the Division of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to drop "Mental Retardation" from its title. The bills both specify that the name change "**shall not be construed to change the criteria by which the division makes eligibility determinations for its programs and services**". The Division would continue serving "a population that has developmental disabilities such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, head injuries, autism, epilepsy, and certain learning disabilities." *

Dropping "MR" from the Division of MRDD title is consistent with changes across the nation made out of respect for people served, who have experienced the "R" word in its hurtful context, and who have been calling for the change in Missouri for over a decade.

Even Special Olympics has officially dropped the "R" word from its vocabulary – because the term is hurtful to its athletes.

As Patrick Wells – president of the Bellefontaine Habilitation Center Parents Association – states in his letter to you, "a patient that has Developmental Disabilities does not necessarily have Mental Retardation". He's right. But the Division is not called the Division of Mental Retardation, Cerebral Palsy, Head Injury, Autism, Epilepsy, and Learning Disabilities. People in Missouri who have the clinical "MR" diagnosis *do* have Developmental Disabilities, defined as a mental or physical impairment that occurs before age 22 and results in at least two functional limitations. There is no reason to single out "MR" in the Division title – particularly when for many people served there are painful associations with the term.

In his letter to you Mr. Wells refers to advocates for the change as "politically correct people" who "want to push patients with Mental Retardation out of the division." He goes on to state that "by removing the words Mental Retardation from the division, the patients with this diagnosis will further be neglected and abused by the state..." These statements could not be further from the truth. The change is a simple one, rooted in respect for people served, and responsiveness to their voices.

Sincerely,

Mike Hanrahan
President
Arc of the United States – Missouri Chapter

* *From the Division's web site.*

<http://thearc.org>
<http://www.arcusmo.com>