



# California Association for the Retarded

1220 "S" Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95811

Phone: (916) 498-1635 Fax: (916) 498-1385

[www.carforchoice.org](http://www.carforchoice.org)

March 7, 2008

Editor

Los Angeles Times

e-mail: [letters@latimes.com](mailto:letters@latimes.com)

Regarding the Times article of March 6, 2008: [Finding a place for the state's severely mentally disabled](#), I want to commend Mr. Therolf for his interest in a matter that deeply affects the lives of thousands of persons with severe or profound mental retardation. His article is very much appreciated, but I want to correct a few critical misconceptions about matters which I feel are vitally important to understanding this issue.

The State Developmental Centers, such as Lanterman, are not mental hospitals. They are licensed as Nursing Facilities, Intermediate Care Facilities/Mentally Retarded and acute hospitals. These facilities provide an array of services and supports for individuals who need a secure environment or who have special medical and/or behavioral program needs. Placement into the community is not always less restrictive for residents of developmental centers. In Bobby Grivich's case, the placement described would not permit him to walk the halls and grounds in safety, but would restrict him to a windowless room with less supervision.

The article mentions the 'dignity of risk' as a justification for exposing people to dangerous situations. There is a reason we have a Lanterman Act. It serves as a basis to serve and support people with unending and life altering conditions. To suggest that it is dignified to leave a vulnerable person in a situation that poses risks – to leave them free to wander into traffic, or to live in sub-par housing – is to embrace a philosophy that inately devalues life and promotes neglect of individuals. The article describes developmental centers as housing 'severely retarded citizens in a system that provides highly trained caretakers always at their side.' There lies the dignity. Trying to place someone in a home where there is 'exposed electrical wiring and no door or window leading outside' is a dangerous duplicity and is commonly called 'dumping.'

Bobby Gravich is lucky to have family to advocate for his rights in the face of efforts to remove him from his home where he has useful relationships and good care. Perhaps a better question for us all is why the state is responding so well to demands that the developmental centers be closed when they are the places the state has figured out how to do funding and staffing to meet the need – and why residents are being forced out based on such hapless incidents as carrying a radio or touching a door knob, into a community that is not prepared to provide the services and support that vulnerable people require to succeed.

Sincerely,

Marion Lieberman, President – California Association for the Retarded, and  
Past President, ARC-California