

FRIENDS of FIRCREST

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For immediate release: September 21, 2005

Fircrest guardians, friends concerned about lack of representation on state panel

Advisory Council to evaluate residential options for individuals with developmental disabilities

Shoreline, WA – Family members and guardians of residents at the Fircrest School, a state-run residential center for individuals with profound developmental disabilities, today expressed concern over the lack of representation on the Governor’s Developmental Disabilities Residential Study Advisory Council tasked with assessing and recommending how the state should deliver residential care to individuals with profound developmental disabilities.

“Those of us who have loved ones living at Fircrest or in the state’s four other homes are very concerned that these individuals have no direct representation on the Council,” said Maureen Durkan, whose sister Sharon has called Fircrest home for more than 30 years.

“No guardians or family members have been appointed to the Council to represent individuals who live in state residential centers, as required by the Legislature.”

Budget language establishing the Council specified that members appointed by the governor would include one representative for “residents of residential habilitation centers,” Durkan pointed out. “We will be watching the work of this Council very closely to ensure it does not turn into a referendum to close state residential centers.”

“The work of this Council is incredibly important,” said Rep. Maralyn Chase, (D) 32nd Legislative District. “It will affect the lives of tens of thousands of citizens with developmental disabilities both today and for generations to come.

“Equally important, this Council and its work presents an opportunity to end the battle within the developmental disabilities community between those who are philosophically opposed to institutions and those who

believe institutions provide the best care for their loved ones,” added Chase, whose district include Fircrest School.

“Therefore, it is critical that the Council’s members be willing to approach their task with an open mind, that they commission a study that evaluates *without bias* the spectrum of services available today, basing all decisions on facts and careful, thorough analysis. Ensuring ‘choice in care’ should be the Council’s goal.”

The Governor's office Tuesday announced the following appointments to the Advisory Council:

1. **Marcy Johnsen**, Registered Nurse from Fircrest School and member of the Service Employees International Union

1. **Dale Colin** of Edgewood, self-advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities

1. **Greg Devereaux**, Executive Director of Washington State Federation of State Employees

1. **Lori Flood** of Bothell, member of the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council

1. **Kathy Leitch**, Assistant Secretary of Aging and Disabilities Services, state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)

1. **John Mahaney** of Yakima, father of a child with developmental disabilities who lives within the community and receives respite care at Yakima Valley School, a state-run residential center

1. **Lance Morehouse**, Director of Advocacy and Family Support, ARC

1. **Karen Ritter**, Regional Administrator for Walsh & Associates

1. **Senator Dale Brandland**, Bellingham

1. **Senator Adam Kline**, Seattle

1. **Representative Brendan Williams**, Olympia

1. **Representative Jan Shabro**, Lake Tapps

1. **Kari Burrell**, Governor Gregoire’s Human Services Executive Policy Advisor

“Ambitious” Timeframe

The Advisory Council was created in the 2005-2007 budget under the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to "study residential services for persons with developmental disabilities." The Advisory Council will have input into a study conducted by OFM to "identify a preferred system of services and a plan to implement the system within four years."

The Council's recommendations are to be submitted to the governor January 1, 2006 – a date called “overly ambitious” by Friends of Fircrest given a tense and controversial environment surrounding residential services for individuals with developmental disabilities due to recent

actions taken by DSHS, particularly at the Fircrest School.

"The reckless and rushed moves of Fircrest residents put at risk these vulnerable and medically fragile residents, many of whom continue to suffer relocation trauma and some even died following the moves," said Jim Hardman, legal guardian for several residents forced to move and a member of Friends of Fircrest.

DSHS began downsizing Fircrest in 2003 using intimidation and inhumane tactics to force residents to leave the school. Over significant protest by parents, guardians and Fircrest supporters, 11 residents were forced to move from the campus without their guardians' consent. Parents and guardians of other residents said they felt they had no

choice but to move their loved ones because DSHS told them the school was closing. In all, 61 residents moved from the school, many into community-based facilities.

Despite state funding for the school through the 2005-2007 millennium, DSHS currently is eliminating 28 staff positions with most of the reductions coming from direct care positions who work closely with clients.

Fircrest is the only state-run residential center located in the Puget Sound urban corridor. One-third of the state's residents with developmental disabilities live in this area. Fircrest offers 24/7 care for individuals who are severely mentally retarded, many of whom also have profound physical disabilities. Fircrest has teaching affiliations and research relationships with the University of Washington and other universities in the local area and nationally. For 2003 and 2004, Fircrest was named one of the country's top nursing facilities by the Consumers Research Council of America.

Fircrest is one of five state-run residential centers serving individuals with profound developmental and physical disabilities. The state's other residential centers are Frances Haddon Morgan Center, Bremerton; Rainier School, Buckley; Yakima Valley School, Selah; and Lakeland Village, Medical Lake.