

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CHILDREN, INC.

Presentation by Melvin D. Heckt, President, on  
"Legislative Day", February 18, 1965.

On behalf of the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children, its over 4,000 members, its 64 local associations, and on behalf of Minnesota's 100,000 retarded, 6,000 of whom reside in our state institutions, may I express our individual and collective heartfelt appreciation for your being here today, for your past interest and accomplishments, and for your present awareness, understanding and desire to help the retarded who live in both our communities and in our institutions receive the care, treatment and training which they so desperately need, so richly deserve, but now so woefully lack.

The purpose of this meeting is two-fold: First, to permit parents to meet you, their legislators, and second: to explain how all retarded individuals can be helped, describe their needs, and respectfully advise what our association believes the 1965 legislature can and should do to help meet these needs.

Society's responsibility for the retarded was best stated by Jesus Christ when He said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, so have ye done it unto me."

Although most of the retarded are some of the least fortunate members of our society, there is no such child or adult who cannot be helped. Even the most profoundly retarded child confined to an institutional bed enjoys a pat on the behind, love, and affection.

It is exciting to know that today many retarded children who just a few years ago were thought totally incapable of lifting their heads from their beds, sitting up or walking by themselves, are in day care centers, special classes, and working in sheltered workshops.

Not every retarded child can be taught all of these things, but each can be taught many more tasks, and certainly more retarded can be trained for employment in their home towns.

It is frustrating to know that today, for those children who can best be cared for in our state institutions, our institutions are so grossly understaffed that these dedicated employees cannot even provide the most minimal basic care, let alone teach and train them to develop anywhere near their capacity, or train more of them for discharge and for employment.

Can you imagine what our wives would say tonight if you and I said, "Honey, I think we ought to have 30, 50, 100, or 200 children for you to care for by yourself"? I am certain I would find my wife in either total shock, or the door slammed shut and summons and complaint served that same evening.

It is equally frustrating to know that for those children who can best be cared for in our communities, there are insufficient numbers of day activity centers, special classes, sheltered workshops, and vocational and rehabilitation services.

Dr. David Vail, medical director of the Department of Public Welfare, said recently, "Minnesota Institutions for the mentally retarded are operating at a stark survival level that is a wrench to the heart. The institutions at Brainerd, Cambridge and Faribault can do little more than to keep retarded children alive, and hope they won't hurt themselves." Anyone who has truly

seen and studied our institutions knows this statement to be completely true. I have personally too many times seen too many wet and soiled bottoms and diapers, too many boils and bruises, too many accidents, too many children and adults who could be, but are not, taught to sit up, to walk, to talk, dress and eat, to play and to work, for me to question the truth of Dr. Vail's statement.

One legislator recently said, "I am a hog farmer. I would not think of building a new hog barn without also building an exercise pen. At Cambridge I saw the lack of fenced-in playgrounds. We are dealing with human beings, not hogs."

Our 6,000 institutionalized retarded range in age from babies to a few over 65, and in intelligence from the most profoundly retarded to the borderline. However, 82 to 88% are profoundly, severely and moderately retarded.

The two primary problems confronting our institutions for the retarded are gross and inhumane understaffing and gross and inhumane overcrowding.

#### Staffing:

The Department of Public Welfare recommends that this Legislature appropriate funds to employ 833 additional employees for our institutions for the retarded. Although Governor Rolvaag has requested more additional employees than any other Governor, to my knowledge, namely, 578, it is our sincere belief that the Legislature should restore the Governor's cutback to the 833 figure which the Welfare Department and our Association have recommended.

You may ask why do we need 833 additional employees?

1. Since 1955, we have increased our institutions' population by 2,000.
2. During the past few years, more and more severely and profoundly retarded, who need more staff care, and fewer moderately and mildly retarded, who need less care, have been admitted.
3. During the past few years, the Department of Welfare has transferred many elderly and working patients to nursing homes and to their communities, thereby reducing the patient work force.
4. Our Association has compared our staffing with every known standard -- Big Ten State Averages, National Averages, AAMD Standards, and NARC Standards -- and our Minnesota understaffing is gross in comparison with these standards.
5. None of our institutions for the retarded have regained their lost hospital accreditation.
6. Our Association conducted an independent survey September 9 and 10, 1964, at almost every dormitory, at every institution, and has compiled and published this information which reveals that 833 additional employees will still bring us up to only approximately 1/3 of the total required by the AAMD, and deemed necessary by our Minnesota Department of Public Welfare.
7. Our request will not provide staff for the 700 patients on the waiting list who need institutional care. It will not provide staff for 700 additional beds needed to complete Brainerd.

#### Buildings and Overcrowding:

Our Association is grateful that there is no overcrowding at Brainerd. But our studies and personal visits to all the institutions for the retarded and the mentally ill conclusively show that Faribault is the most grossly understaffed and overcrowded institution of all, bar none. Cambridge rates a close second.

we are to complete Brainerd and eliminate the 700 waiting list -- if we  
also to eliminate the overcrowding at Cambridge -- and if we are to  
eliminate the overcrowding and use of obsolete and inadequate dormitories  
at Faribault, most of which would be closed by the State Fire Marshall and  
Department of Health if operated by private enterprise -- 2,750 new beds  
must be provided.

If the Legislature should continue the present rate of providing one 125-bed  
dormitory per session, it will take 22 sessions or 44 years to solve the  
present building needs.

Our Association, therefore, recommends that the 1965 Legislature appropriate  
funds to build 900 new beds -- 400 for Faribault, 200 for Cambridge, and 300  
for Brainerd. We also recommend that this Legislature give consideration to  
reducing the cost of new dormitories, especially those for the working and  
school patients.

You, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Legislature, and only you, can determine  
the number of employees and level of care. It will be for you to decide  
whether our institutions will continue to provide bare survival care, as  
opposed to group and individual and rehabilitative care, which will permit  
all the retarded to develop near to their capacities, and some to be dis-  
charged and given opportunity for sheltered or full time employment.

We are confident that the public is now willing to pay its fair share of the  
cost of so helping the retarded and others who are truly handicapped.

Thanks again for being here today and for your ever-increasing interest in  
these least fortunate -- our retarded.

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Duplicated by the  
Minnesota Association for Retarded Children  
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