

November 7, 2015

To: Commissioner Macy

From: Ruth Gilbert Wall, sister of a client

Re: STS Recommendations

Dear Sir,

I was notified by my brother's social worker that this request for input was issued by your office. I am glad to hear of it.

My brother, John Gilbert, was a resident of Southbury Training School for 60 years. As a child, I remember being frightened of the large space, the great number of "different" people walking around, when we would visit my big brother. I remember my brother smiling and casting his hand out in an arc to demonstrate as he told me "This is a big country". To him it was a land he mastered, a land where he was known and loved, and safe.

My family was one that got tied up in old stories and grief and could never find its way to bring John home, ever, for a visit. Not until I became his guardian, in 1994, had he left campus with his own flesh and blood. He needed the love of his caretakers, and he was very lucky to have had their community to surround him. It is the community of the long term staff that made Southbury strong for John right up until his death, and even afterwards, for me. People came to his bedside in the infirmary as he was dying, and played songs for him that he had once played when in the marching band. People made the loveliest funeral imaginable, right in his cottage, and told their stories about John. I have been tempted to stop by even now, to see the people who really took me in when John was failing and I needed comfort and support.

I recommend that you keep staff on and buildings open, because the quality of care is excellent, and a long tradition of caring remains alive.

I recommend that you offer spots in existing cottages to out of state, paying clients, to perpetuate the ongoing excellent level of care the state oversees. I believe there are aging parents in neighboring states who worry about the lack of oversight in a community based group home, as my family did.

I wrote many times in support of STS when my brother was alive, and am willing to testify at any time to the warm community that still exists in the walls of the remaining buildings in use.

Ruth Gilbert Wall

Appleton, Maine.

