



State of Connecticut  
Department of Developmental Services



M. Jodi Rell  
Governor

Peter H. O'Meara  
Commissioner

Kathryn du Pree  
Deputy Commissioner

August 27, 2008

Stacey Snider  
Dreamworks SKG  
100 Universal City Plaza  
Building 10  
Universal City, CA 91608

Dear Ms. Snider:

We are writing to express our concerns about the portrayal of individuals with disabilities in the recently released movie "Tropic Thunder." As the agency in Connecticut that provides services and supports to over 20,000 individuals with developmental disabilities, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has received numerous comments and concerns about the disrespect this movie portrays towards individuals with a diagnosis of mental retardation.

The Department of Developmental Services' mission is to join with others to create the conditions under which all the people we serve experience 1) Presence and participation in Connecticut town life 2) Opportunities to develop and exercise competence 3) Opportunities to make choices in the pursuit of a personal future 4) Good relationships with family members and friends and 5) Respect and dignity.

The use of the word "retard" has become increasingly pejorative and derogatory through the years. There has been increasing interest from advocates, families, and consumers nationally and specifically in Connecticut, in response to the term "mental retardation" because it is sometimes thought to be stigmatizing and offensive to people. To this end, the Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation changed its name in 2007 to the Department of Developmental Services.

Understandably, names and terminologies change over time. There has been a national movement among self-advocates and others to use more respectful language when referring to individuals with disabilities. For example, the President's Committee on Mental Retardation was renamed the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) an organization of professionals and others concerned about people with intellectual disabilities and related disabilities since 1876, recently changed its name from The American Association on Mental Retardation. These groups changed their names in response to feedback from people with disabilities and in recognition of the negative stigma associated with the sometimes negative use of the term "mental retardation."

A member of the New York State Partners in Policymaking class of 2004, a group that helped write New York's "People First Language" legislation, said that "Words set the tone for attitudes and can change perceptions. Certain terms perpetuate negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and exclude them as being viewed as equal citizens."

The demographic of young people who will view this movie and the negative reinforcing effect of the prejudicial terms used will be devastating to increased efforts to integrate people with disabilities into society. Words and names have power. Specific words have been known to denigrate entire segments of society, and the word "retard" is no less hurtful or negatively reinforcing.

We implore you to consider the above information when choosing future movies to produce and promote and hope that you will eliminate the pejorative use of the word "retard." It is unfortunate that anyone felt it was justifiable to use the phrase "never go full retard" in the movie "Tropic Thunder." This is extremely hurtful to individuals and their families who have fought so hard to be perceived as contributing members of the communities they live in.

Thank you for taking the time to read our concerns and suggestions for future movie productions.

Sincerely,

Peter H. O'Meara, Commissioner  
Department of Developmental Services

Jennifer Carroll, Chairperson  
Council on Developmental Services

Cc: Members, Connecticut Council on Developmental Services  
Connecticut Down Syndrome Congress  
Connecticut Special Olympics  
People First of Connecticut  
Self Advocate Coordinators, Connecticut Department of Developmental Services  
David Geffen, Dreamworks SKG  
Steven Spielberg, Dreamworks SKG