

Arc of VA Families Outraged by Elected Official's Remarks

2/23/2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 22, 2010

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**The Arc of Virginia: Families Outraged By Delegate Robert Marshall's Remarks**

The Arc of Virginia is surprised and disappointed by remarks attributed to Delegate Robert Marshall indicating he believes children with disabilities were "God's punishment." Such unfortunate remarks continue to lend credence to the stigma people with disabilities and their families are fighting to overcome.

Since this issue went public today, many family members who heard the audio remarks have contacted The Arc to express their outrage over Delegate Marshall's statements. Delegate Marshall has issued an apology saying he "regrets any misimpression my poorly chosen words may have created as to my deep commitment to fighting for these vulnerable children and their families." The Arc takes him at his word.

Mr. Howard Cullum, President of The Arc of Virginia said, "Many of our families are struggling with the 24/7 care taking demands. It is rewarding but hard work. Families don't appreciate statements that can be construed to connect having a disabled child with some religious punishment. Our families don't need the grief or the guilt."

According to Mr. Cullum, "The Arc families are especially sensitive now because of proposed state budget cuts to critical services that support persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The Arc appreciates yesterday's House and Senate budget reports that seek to restore some of the services. However, the important waiver program is still slated to lose 1,134 waiver slots that were scheduled to begin reducing the long wait lists. Our wait list families are in pain and crisis."

The waiver wait list is now over 6,000 persons and growing rapidly. The lack of waivers means families will now have to wait at least another two years before any new waiver slots are available. Some families have already been waiting for years. The safety net for our families is in tatters.

Historically, Virginia's track record for valuing the lives of people with disabilities has not been good. The Commonwealth was notorious for its history of involuntary sterilization, for its state-sponsored segregation and institutionalization and for its minimal help for families. Even today, Virginia is currently ranked 46th in the country for its community support of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

At a time when the majority of states are moving people with intellectual disabilities out of institutions, Virginia is the only state seeking to rebuild costly, segregated state institutions for people with intellectual disabilities. The Arc is hopeful that Delegate Marshall's comments, however offensive to our families, draw public attention to the plight of families caring for persons with disabilities in our state.