

SUNDAY OPINION

LETTERS

Health care

Disabled support

Dear Editor: Legislation has been proposed that would seriously damage the basic support system that provides services to the developmentally disabled in our state, those people who are retarded, have epilepsy, cerebral palsy, autism and a host of severe disabilities that occur at birth or early childhood.

The new legislation would fundamentally alter the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act by denying services to new cases unless someone receiving services dies, moves away, or no longer receives services.

In other words, a new-born child with Downs Syndrome would not be eligible for services unless the overall caseload in that child's region was reduced by attrition. Infants needing physical

therapy to treat the effects of cerebral palsy might not be eligible for services. The results could be devastating to the family and the individual.

Most families want to care for their own children at home, if it is humanly possible, but often it is a continuous, 24 hour-a-day challenge. To assist parents with children at home, a limited amount of respite care has been provided by the state to allow parents to recuperate and just take care of the everyday things that need to get done. The new legislation would eliminate all respite and recreational programs for the Developmentally Disabled. If only 10 percent of families are unable to cope with caring for a profoundly disabled child, and seek community placement, all the proposed savings would be lost.

To add insult to injury, individuals who are denied services would lose their rights to a fair hearing to appeal.

Today the people of the state of California are facing one of the greatest, most defining challenges in our history. How we choose to deal with this crisis will affect all of our lives for several generations and will determine what kind of people we really are.

As the father of a developmentally disabled adult son, I urge everyone to contact the governor and their legislators and oppose the destruction of one of the best pieces of legislation California has ever had. We should not abandon a single child or adult who is unfortunate enough to be developmentally disabled.

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