

Statement Regarding WDH Facilities Task Force Report and Recommendations
by
Friends of Wyoming Life Resource Center and VOR

Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Committee
Senator Charles Scott, Chairman
Representative Elaine Harvey, Chairman

Mr. Chairman, Ms. Chairman, and Esteemed Members of the Committee;

Last year, HDR Architects, Inc. along with Plan One Architects, completed a study of the health facilities owned and operated by the State of Wyoming under the auspices of the Department of Health. This study was commissioned by the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Committee. Upon completion of the study, the Department of Health advised against moving the residents of the Wyoming Life Resource Center (WLRC). The Committee wanted the WLRC to operate more efficiently to cut costs.

As a result, during the 2014 Budget Session of the Wyoming State Legislature, a Joint Executive and Legislative Task Force on Department of Health Facilities was established.

The Facilities Task Force was very gracious and allowed generous time for public comment at each of their meetings. Members also asked questions of the public in order to clarify statements made. They also provided for public comment online. The Facilities Task Force was transparent and made available the documents used in their determinations and work products. We commend and thank the members of the Task Force for their consideration, time, and efforts in this endeavor.

The WDH Facilities Task Force has formed four options for the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Committee to consider; along with additional recommendations. These are being presented in the order of the Task Force's preference.

We agree with the Task Force that **Option 1(a)** would be the more preferred choice of the four options. It meets their recommendation that the role of the State be that of a "safety net" provider without competing with the private sector for care provision outside the "safety net." Option 1(a) is consistent with the WDH's recommendation following the HDR study that residents should not be forced to transition out of WLRC; and the Task Force's recommendation that current residents be considered a "legacy population" and not be forced to transition from their home. In addition, the Lander area is more suitable for employee recruitment; which has been problematic in the Basin area.

Option 1(b) is less desirable as it too drastically changes the core mission of the WLRC. We believe such a change would affect the services to the "legacy population" during the transitioning of the facilities. It is imperative that the residents of WLRC be afforded the same quality, integrated care they currently receive.

Option 2, labelled “Status Quo plus upgrades” is described incorrectly to suggest there would be no changes in the patient care delivered. In fact, the capital improvements and the proposed “right sizing” of the WLRC, we believe, will improve patient care and will protect, consistent with the Task Force’s “safety net” recommendation, current and future residents. This may afford the facilities to operate on an enterprise funding model as recommended and allow this Committee to determine the true cost to the State in operating each of the WDH facilities without relying on SWAG numbers. Considering the numbers used to calculate costs to the State are not concrete and Option 1(a) has not been scored; the ranking of “4” for in savings to the State Option 2 is questionable.

Option 3, “One Facility,” is simply unacceptable as it proposes mixing potentially incompatible populations at the risk of the most vulnerable.

As guardians, family members, and advocates, we are concerned with the elimination of choice between facilities and community programs. Some of the WLRC residents are there because they chose to stay following the Weston settlement. Others chose to apply for admission after home and/or community placements failed. Eliminating or limiting choice is contrary to the letter and spirit of the *Olmstead* Supreme Court Decision. Wyoming is the Equality State; long known for nurturing civil rights and freedoms. One of our most valued rights is the right to choose; we choose where to live, how to worship, which political party to join; who to marry or not to marry at all. If we have the right to choose, shouldn’t individuals with I/DD also be allowed to make some of those same choices; and if they are unable, shouldn’t their guardians be able to make that choice for them?

While we would prefer that all the WDH Facilities missions remain intact and other avenues for cost effectiveness be explored; we understand the Legislature’s desire to save money. Friends of WLRC and VOR strongly urge this Committee to adopt Option 1(a) without elimination of choice; with Option 2 “Status Quo with Upgrades” a very close second.

Respectfully,

Shawn Humberson
Friends of WLRC, President of Board
VOR, State Co-Coordinator

Julie Huso
VOR Executive Director