

December 8, 2008

Protection and Advocacy for  
Persons with Developmental  
Disabilities

Protection and Advocacy for  
Individuals with Mental Illness

Protection and Advocacy of  
Individual Rights

Protection and Advocacy for  
Assistive Technology

Protection and Advocacy for  
Individuals with  
Traumatic Brain Injury

Protection and Advocacy for  
Beneficiaries of Social Security

Protection and Advocacy for  
Voting Accessibility

*Designated by the Governor  
to The University of Alabama  
in accordance with Public Laws  
100-146 and 99-319. ADAP is  
the protection and advocacy  
system for Alabama on behalf  
of persons with disabilities.*



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RE: Partlow – A Call for Closure

There was a time in the disability field when building institutions was considered the right thing to do. There was a time when professionals, mostly physicians, felt that segregation was the humane way for people with intellectual disabilities to live. There was a time when governments saw institutions as an inexpensive way to house lots of people together for efficiency.

Those days are over. Alabama has closed four of its five institutions. The Ireland, Wallace, Brewer and Tarwater Centers were closed by carefully developing individualized and less expensive places near families. No one argues that those closures were wrong, least of all the thousands of people who lived there.

In the one remaining institution, the W. D. Partlow Developmental Center in Tuscaloosa, costs have soared beyond a tolerable level. Despite the huge budget, people live in filthy conditions. Their lives are filled with time-wasting activities intended to keep them quiet and compliant. They are subject to abuse and neglect and, most cruelly, to being ignored day after day. Partlow has repeatedly failed to meet basic health and safety standards monitored by external funding agencies.

In this report we identify the many reasons why the W. D. Partlow Developmental Center must be closed. And, the sooner the better. The people who live at Partlow can be supported well for less money. It is not too late for individuals to have good lives with meaningful work, privacy, friends, and involvement with their communities and churches.

There are no shortcuts. It is not enough to think that “changes” can be made to Partlow to improve it. Pouring good money after bad will not fix the problem. There is only one solution, and the people who live at Partlow told us that solution over and over. They know where they want to live. It is time for Alabama to listen to their voices.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ellen B. Gillespie'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'E' and 'G'.

Ellen B. Gillespie, Ph.D.  
Executive Director