

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

STANFORD MEDICAL CENTER
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA 94304

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

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Area Code 415
321-1200

To the Editor
San Francisco Chronicle
San Francisco, California

Dear Sir:

The Chronicle should be congratulated for its excellent news coverage of the impact of budget cuts for mental hygiene on retarded children and on adults with serious mental and emotional problems. There is perhaps some inclination not to want to think about these distressing problems. If we could but "warehouse" the mentally ill and the retarded, perhaps we could forget about our social responsibilities to these people. It is easy to show, however, that the human and economic cost of the warehouse approach is immeasurably greater than the cost of dynamic medical, psychotherapeutic and educational treatment. In many cases these can rescue a worthwhile life. For this reason, the outpatient care programs have special importance, and they had just been getting under way in the State's mental hygiene program when the cuts were imposed.

The present controversy may be based on nothing more than a logistic error in the Governor's office. I wonder whether the actual consequences of the piece-meal budget revisions simply had not been carefully enough calculated. There could hardly have been enough time for a serious study in the frantic effort to reconstruct the State's fiscal structure to match the ideologies of a newly elected administration. This confusion can, however, be turned to good advantage if it has dramatized the importance of the most careful study of the State's mental hygiene program.

I urge the Governor to appoint a commission to make such a study: one that will realistically assess our needs in a time of rapid changes in medical-psychiatric technique, one that will analyze the financing and economic benefit of carefully thought out programs for institutional and for outpatient care, one that will encompass the whole range of governmental responsibility for mental hygiene in this state, avoiding the game of buckpassing between State and counties and cities, and one that can make plans for the most effective utilization of some federal support that is becoming available for the most forward-looking demonstration programs.

The present cuts may be a small mistake, made in haste. They provoke an opportunity to demonstrate great statesmanship and deliberation, worthy of the executive of the richest state in the union.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Director, Kennedy Laboratories

LT. J. P. KENNEDY, JR. LABORATORIES FOR MOLECULAR MEDICINE, DEDICATED TO RESEARCH IN MENTAL RETARDATION

MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

HEREDITY

NEUROBIOLOGY

DEVELOPMENTAL MEDICINE