



Everything Jersey

## Transition or Ground Hog Day

**By Robert Stack**

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I was cleaning out some old files and I came across Governor Jon S. Corzine's "Final Report- Human Services Transition Policy Group," from 2006. At the time, I was involved with these issues, I thought this effort was worthwhile. We finally could affect policy to help people with disabilities to be emancipated from costly institutions into the community where they would work and become productive members of society. It was so obvious to me.

New Jersey is ranked 49th as the worst state for people with disabilities in the country. Over 14 states do not have people living in institutions. We had over 3,200 at the time of the report in 2006. A reduction of 45% was a positive step in the right direction. State institutions are a shameful relic of failed public policy.

I thought, as did others that the Governor believed this to be true. The report issued in January 2006 specifically states "Direct the Department of Human Services to develop, with input from stakeholders, and implement a plan to move approximately 1,500 residents from developmental centers into supportive housing in the community."

You can imagine our chagrin to see that not only did this not happen, but that they have actually increased the number of people with disabilities living in costly institutions. The Governor is ignoring New Jersey's most vulnerable citizens by neglecting to place them into community-based programs.

Last week I was at a fund raiser in Vernon, New Jersey. I met a parent that was number 5,234 out of an 8,100 person waiting list for services. Her son is severely autistic and in need of a lot of help. When I asked her what she was going to do, I suggested she write to the Governor. She said she did that and got a typical response. She said that her and her husband, who owned an operated a business in North Jersey, had a solution. They were going to lay off the 34 workers they had, sell the business, and move to New York where their son would receive services.

I hope the Governor will dust off this report and push to do what was set in motion quite some time ago. It will help the economy, bring more jobs to New Jersey but most of all improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families.

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