



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Department of Human Services Announces Three-Year Plan to Close Two State Centers, Transition Residents to Community Living

Harrisburg, PA – Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller today announced the closure of Polk State Center in Venango County and White Haven State Center in Luzerne County. The closure process is expected to take about three years. Both centers are intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The closures reflect the Wolf Administration's work to serve more people in the community, reduce reliance on institutional care, and improve access to home- and community-based services so every Pennsylvanian can live an everyday life.

Consistent with national trends, Pennsylvania has steadily closed most of its state centers since the 1960s when best practices turned toward community-based settings and away from institutions. Fifty years ago, in Pennsylvania, DHS served more than 13,000 people with intellectual disabilities in state-operated facilities. Twenty years ago, state centers served 3,000 individuals. Today, fewer than 720 individuals receive care in a state center, a decrease of more than 70 percent since 1999.

Polk currently serves 194 residents at its 2,000-acre campus; White Haven currently serves 112 at its 192-acre campus. In comparison, about 40,000 Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities supported by DHS live in community-based settings in Pennsylvania.

"This is an incredible moment in our history in Pennsylvania," said DHS Sec. Teresa Miller. "Over the past 120 years, thousands of Pennsylvanians with intellectual disabilities lived some or all their lives in Polk and White Haven state centers. We recognize their history and commend the work that center staff have done to support these individuals and their families, but we also must commit to a future that truly includes individuals with disabilities and offers them an everyday life as fully integrated members of our communities.

"Having an intellectual disability does not mean a person is incapable of making decisions, contributing to their community, or exploring lifelong learning opportunities. Community-based settings honor the inherent value of every person and empower individuals to choose the direction of their own lives."

Following the successful 2018 closure plan of Hamburg State Center, DHS will work directly with each resident and family from Polk and White Haven to explore all options, meet with potential community service providers and develop individualized transition plans. After discharge from a state center, DHS social workers, and licensing and regional staff will closely monitor each person's transition to ensure they are safe, happy and settled into their new home.

With a goal to serve more people in community-based settings, many people can live closer to their families. Post-discharge monitoring and satisfaction surveys indicate that people who moved from Hamburg Center to community settings are overwhelmingly happy with their new homes, the majority of them closer to family.

"No resident will leave Polk or White Haven without a destination of their choosing and a fully developed plan that meets their physical, emotional, social and mental health needs," said Sec. Miller. "We will not rush this process. We are committed to working closely with residents, families, and employees to ensure a smooth, safe transition." Researchers have concluded after many decades of study that people are healthier, and experience more opportunities and a higher quality of life in community-based settings. Currently, people are rarely admitted to intermediate care facilities as young adults because they and their families overwhelmingly choose community-based settings.

Serving people in the community also has a benefit for taxpayers. As the state centers' censuses have declined, the annual average cost of care per resident at Polk and White Haven is now \$409,794 and \$434,821, respectively. Community-based care typically comes with a smaller price tag.

All regular care and operations will continue at the state centers as DHS works through the relocation and closure process. About 1,173 state employees who work at the Polk and White Haven State Centers will be supported throughout the closure process to assure they have increased opportunities for future employment. Every effort will be made to place employees who wish to continue with commonwealth employment into existing vacant positions for which they qualify. Furloughing staff is a last resort and the least desirable outcome.

Every staff member working at Hamburg Center at the time of closure who expressed an interest in continued state employment was offered a job either prior to the actual closure of the facility or in the one-year contractual placement period following the closure.

DHS will hold public hearings within 30 days of the closure announcement to accept comment about the closure from stakeholders, officials, and the community. Hearings are scheduled for:

- Polk State Center – Monday, September 9, 1 p.m. – Atlantic Avenue Church, 160 Atlantic Ave., Franklin, PA
- White Haven State Center – Thursday, September 12, 1 p.m. – Hazleton One Community Center, 225 E. 4th St, Hazleton, PA

A toll-free hotline has been established for family members of Polk and White Haven residents who have questions during the closure process. Family members will be able to speak with staff from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday by calling 1.888.565.9435 or by email at RA-PWRASStateCenters@pa.gov.

For more information regarding services for people with intellectual disabilities and the closure, visit www.dhs.pa.gov.

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