



Statement on Gov. Blunt's Privatization Plan for Bellefontaine Habilitation Center

Sen. Timothy Green, D-Spanish Lake and Representative Gina Walsh, D-Moline Acres, today cautiously welcomed a plan to keep Bellefontaine open, hopefully for the long-term.

"The governor's plan recognizes the vital need for Bellefontaine to exist, which is a welcome realization and a constructive step in the right direction," said Sen. Green, "However, at this time many questions must be answered and the plan must be thoroughly examined."

Rep. Gina Walsh and Sen. Green will be meeting with Blunt's director of Mental Health this week to discuss the particulars of the governor's plan. In that meeting, they will urge the director to review Senate Bill 174, as amended, that contains mental health reforms that are urgently needed to ensure the safety of the residents in private facilities.

Sen. Green and Rep. Walsh introduced comprehensive legislation to protect the elderly and mentally disabled in private group home facilities.

"Prior to implementation of the governor's plan, the legislature should pass and the governor should sign comprehensive mental health reform to ensure the safety of the residents that reside in the privately operated facilities," said Rep. Walsh.

Families of those served by the state's habilitation centers for the developmentally disabled called for legislation earlier this year that will maintain state-operated centers while instituting standards, oversight and accountability for Missouri's private group home industry.

"The Legislature has an opportunity to act this legislative session and should consider passing Senate Bill 174," Sen. Green said.

The legislation would:

- Ban further employment anywhere of staff found to be abusive;
- Open private facilities to the scrutiny of the state's Sunshine laws;
- Mandate reporting of abuse and neglect, including medication errors, in private facilities;
- Require staff turnover reporting to the General Assembly;
- Require dismissal of private contractor employees who violate state laws and rules;
- Require private facility staff to have training comparable to state center employees, to be paid for by the private provider; and
- Place a moratorium on any Hab center transfers to private facilities until the legislation is fully implemented.