



Finn Gardiner

[REDACTED]
Somerville MA 02144

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Bill HB89/SB80, 14 July 2015

To Senator Flanagan, Representative Khan and the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities:

I am the Boston Community Coordinator for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, the chapter leader for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network's Greater Boston chapter, and a concerned state citizen writing in support of HB89/SB80 – An Act Relative to the use of aversive therapy – which would ban the use of “aversives,” or electric shocks as a means of training. The Judge Rotenberg Center (JRC) in Canton is currently the only facility that is permitted to use this method of “education,” but one facility that uses these methods is more than enough, and there is no reasonable justification for it to remain open.

The JRC falls short of its educational goals through the abusive treatments they use in order to achieve their ends. The treatment the JRC applies to its inmates is nothing short of torture, and it is morally unconscionable that Massachusetts allows this to continue. People are subjected to electrical shocks if they do something that a staff member deems inappropriate, which is the height of cruelty. These shocks have the possibility of inflicting burns and other physical trauma, and can contribute to lifelong psychological trauma that manifests in the form of PTSD and other mental health issues. Additionally, JRC residents are subjected to emotional abuse, manipulation and regimented control of their lives. The JRC's treatment of its residents is cruel and unjust, and contributes to the continued oppression of people with disabilities.

Survivors of the JRC's abuse have written extensively about the mistreatment they incurred from staff members: <http://jrcabuse.tumblr.com/> is a blog run by Jennifer Msumba, a former JRC resident who has written extensively about her experiences. She has also written a multi-part account that is hosted on the Autistic Self Advocacy Network: <http://autisticadvocacy.org/2014/11/jrc-survivor-speaks-out-part-1/>

I urge you to ban the use of this “therapy” in Massachusetts — allowing it to continue does nothing but perpetuate the maltreatment and torture of the people who are confined to institutions that use this method as a means of training and education. There is no reason for this facility to remain open.

Yours sincerely,

Finn Gardiner, Boston Community Coordinator, Autistic Self Advocacy Network
fgardiner@autisticadvocacy.org