

# Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania

A merger of PP&A and the  
Disabilities Law Project

*Advancing the rights of people with disabilities*

| PHILADELPHIA |

The Philadelphia Building  
1315 Walnut St., Suite 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Phone 215-238-8070

TTY 215-789-2498

Fax 215-772-3126

drnpa-phil@drnpa.org

October 6, 2009

Jim Conroy and Jean Searle, Co-Presidents  
Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance  
426B Darby Road  
Havertown, PA 19083

**RE: Letter of Support - Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance**

Dear Jim and Jean:

The Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN) is writing in support of the Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance and the vision that something lasting be created from the buildings at the old abandoned Pennhurst Institution.

DRN agrees with the Alliance that something should be done to assure that we as a nation never forget the way we used to treat our citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A memorial will remind the nation never to return to segregation, isolation, overcrowding, and the taking away of freedoms from citizens with disabilities.

DRN supports your efforts to designate the land, the buildings, the old cemetery of graves that once had only numbers (or no markers at all), as a memorial, an archive, a center for scholarly and historical research, and perhaps even a museum.

DRN is aware that although Pennhurst closed in 1987, and the Commonwealth was unable to sell it. Although one building was converted for use as a Veteran's Hospital and several were adapted to house National Guard administrative units, the oldest buildings surrounding the "courtyard" have lain dormant and are now overgrown and trashed by trespassers and explorers.

DRN is also aware that the Commonwealth has sold the most historic parts of the property and the buildings to a developer and that the development plan is to tear down the historic buildings, making way for a housing development.

DRN supports your belief that this would be a great shame. DRN believes it is important to preserve some or all of the old buildings, to convert the land and the

PITTSBURGH | 1901 Law & Finance Building | 429 Fourth Avenue | Pittsburgh, PA 15219-1505

Phone 412-391-5225 | TTY 412-467-8940 | Fax 412-391-4496 | drnpa-pgh@drnpa.org

HARRISBURG | 1414 N. Cameron St., Suite C | Harrisburg, PA 17103

Phone 1-800-692-7443 or 717-236-8110 | TTY 1-877-375-7139 or 717-346-0293 | Fax 717-236-0912 | drnpa-hbg@drnpa.org

[www.drnpa.org](http://www.drnpa.org)



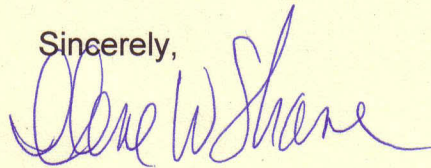
buildings to uses that will memorialize the more than 10,000 souls who lived there, most of whom died there – and also to commemorate the first great and successful movement of people out of an institution and into small, family-like community homes in regular neighborhoods. The extraordinary success of this dramatic change in social policy, to the people themselves and to society at large, is almost immeasurable.

DRN supports your vision of “Never Forget” namely the conversion of the Administration Building into a museum modeled after the Holocaust Memorial and Museum. We support your efforts to preserve some of the other buildings for multiple uses including the Archive & Library, the Research Center, and the Conference Center.

DRN supports your decision to hire people who once lived at Pennhurst for “real jobs” at the Memorial complex and supports your efforts to attract people in our communities who have intellectual or developmental disabilities to work for the project.

DRN is honored to be among those who support the Preservation Alliance including Ginny Thornburgh, wife of Governor Thornburgh during the closure years; Bill Baldini, who did the first expose for NBC in 1968; Tom Gilhool, lead attorney for Public Interest Law Center; Betty Potts, the first person to move to a community home under Judge Raymond Broderick’s Federal Court Order; the Arc of PA; the Executive Director of TASH; Nancy Thaler of NASDDDS; and, many more.

Sincerely,



Ilene W. Shane  
Chief Executive Officer