

Private: Polly Spare's Enduring Legacy

Note: The below letter to Ann Knighton, President of VOR, is a tribute not only to Polly Spare, but to all those – past, present and future – who battle statism for the right for parents and families to learn about all service options and then to choose those they feel are most appropriate for their developmentally disabled sons and daughters. (Dan Torisky)

September 11, 2013

Ms. Ann Knighton, President
VOR
Suite 351
836 S. Arlington Heights Road
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

Dear Ms. Knighton:

We are all so pleased to see that Polly Spare is your 2013 Voice Award recipient. No matter how one might praise Polly and her work, it would be an understatement. Her energy and her impact in addressing critical issues involving those who do not choose to be care-dependent are unmatched.

In Pennsylvania, she often stood alone against the statist-driven mindset of our state's governors, human service bureaucrats, and their "advisory committees" dominated by one-size-fits-all advozealots. Polly's example continues to inspire us parents and families as we battle to protect our right to learn about and then choose options we feel are best for our sons and daughters with mental retardation, autism and related disorders of behavior and communication.

Particularly memorable was Polly's exhaustive 24/7 support in the defense of the Western Center state residential care and treatment facility against the 12-year assault by the combined forces of Pennsylvania's Association for Retarded Citizens, its Protection and Advocacy Agency, its Department of Public Welfare Secretary Feather Houstoun and Deputy Nancy Thaller, and its Governor Tom Ridge.

This fight was lost in 2001, partly due to overwhelming state funding, but primarily due to the untimely death of our magnificent attorney William Burke, another most deserving VOR Award recipient.

Polly Spare and all of us will always grieve the resultant deaths of 38 former Western Center residents, uninvestigated, during and soon after the brutal closing process. Only God knows how many more have left this earth prematurely due to these statist, as well as the thousands more languishing on waiting lists, in unstable homes, prisons, mental health units, tent cities and under bridges.

Thanks to organizations like VOR, the nationwide battle against this inhuman, anti-family scourge is still not lost. And I am personally grateful to have been on this earth the same time as you all – and Polly Spare.