

People First of Tennessee, Inc. News Release

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State Retaliates Against Advocacy Group by Eliminating Contract

After taking a stand against funding cuts in programs supporting Tennessee's most vulnerable citizens, People First of Tennessee received a letter from the TN Division of Mental Retardation that its self-advocacy contract will not be renewed. The funding cuts have been a major source of contention during this spring's budget hearings with provider agencies being forced to absorb a 6.1% reduction in payments as well as other overall efforts to reduce community services. At a loss to stem the harmful effects of these unilateral actions, People First took action by filing a motion for contempt in their lawsuit against the Arlington Developmental Center, alleging that the current course of action taken by the DMRS puts Arlington lawsuit class members' health and safety in jeopardy. In response, this week the organization received notice that its contract to provide training in advocacy to DMRS recipients would not be renewed.

"We feel that this is retaliation for our actions regarding the budget cuts," says Leanne Boyce, Executive Director. "DMRS tried to cancel our contract when we first filed our case against the Arlington Developmental Center in 1991. We feel there is a definite pattern of unlawful retaliation on DMR's part."

People First has had its self-advocacy contract with the state since 1987. Funding from this grant has been used to assist individuals with developmental disabilities learn how to speak up and become contributing citizens in their local communities. "Having this contract eliminated now," explained Ms. Boyce, "when the need to educate service recipients about their rights with regard to the funding cuts, only increases the likelihood that service reductions will proceed without due recourse being taken by those affected."