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
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