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09/06/2019

**The Arc of Texas Issues the Following Statement on the Death of Denton SSLC Resident Kevin Lewis and Subsequent Disappearance of El Paso SSLC Resident Edna Rojo:**

The Arc of Texas extends our deepest sympathies to Kevin Lewis' family and loved ones. Texas has again failed to respect and protect the life of a Texan with an intellectual and developmental disability. Mr. Lewis was reported missing and then was found dead at the Denton SSLC on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The Arc of Texas is deeply concerned with Texas' capacity and commitment to protect the quality of life and safety of the residents at Texas' 13 State Supported Living Centers or SSLCs. SSLC authorities must be held accountable for their negligence that caused the premature death of Mr. Lewis. Many questions remain unanswered including details of the circumstances that preceded and the cause of Mr. Lewis' death. Mr. Lewis' family, loved ones, 2,900+ SSLC residents and the broader disability community deserve answers and corrective actions to prevent future tragedies.

We have been equally concerned for Edna Rojo, a resident at the El Paso SSLC, who was reported missing on July 23, 2019. We are elated to hear that she has been found 44 days after disappearing from the SSLC. Questions remain as to how Ms. Rojo ended up in New Mexico. Despite the State touting SSLCs as the safest care centers for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, these instances remain far too common. The SSLC system continues to fail the children and adults they were created to protect and serve, even after with numerous reforms, increased scrutiny, additional funding and Department of Justice interventions. Staffing shortages, high turnover, civil rights violations and rampant abuse at Texas' 13 SSLCs are terrifyingly common. Rapidly declining census and aging infrastructure is unsustainable and it is not an issue of resources. Since the 2009 settlement agreement, Texas has invested millions of taxpayer dollars into SSLCs. The population at the SSLCs declined 75% since the 1980s, yet not a single facility has been consolidated or closed.

The Arc of Texas calls on Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick, Speaker Bonnen and the Texas Legislature to pass legislation during the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session that directs the Health and Human Services Commission to consolidate the SSLC system to ensure the quality of life and safety of residents. We call on the Health and Human Services Commission to publish an action plan to quickly come into full compliance with the 2009 settlement agreement. Ten years is far too long to remain out of compliance while SSLC residents' safety and lives are at risk. We call on the U.S. Department of Justice and Texas law enforcement agencies to fully investigate the death of Mr. Kevin Lewis and disappearance of Ms. Edna Rojo and take any action necessary to hold SSLCs and the State of Texas accountable. We call on the Texas taxpayers to demand answers from their legislators on why we continue to fund a system that has a long, persistent history harming the residents in the care of the SSLCs.

**From 2016 to Present:**

- The El Paso, Brenham and San Angelo SSLCs were found to have dangerous levels of lead in their water systems. Some as high as 18 times the health consumption level.
- A Lufkin SSLC employee was sentenced to jail after assaulting a 15-year-old resident by repeatedly slamming her head into the ground.
- A Brenham SSLC employee was arrested for the possession of child pornography.
- A resident at the Brenham SSLC was left in a hot car die.
- A San Angelo SSLC direct support professional punished a resident by kicking her in the face.
- A Lufkin SSLC employee coerced residents to perform sexual acts on each other before sexually assaulting them himself.
- Nine of the 13 SSLCs were in jeopardy of losing their Medicaid funding for serious delinquencies.
- Texas paid more than \$30 million in overtime and contract pay to cover the care at the 13 SSLCs because staffing levels remain a systemic and persistent failure of the system.
- Two Abilene SSLC staff were arrested for having sex in front of multiple SSLC residents.
- The San Angelo SSLC was placed into “immediate jeopardy” which is the worst classification a SSLC can receive for not having appropriate staffing levels to support the residents. Two other SSLCs were also placed into punitive stages because of their staffing levels.

**From 2009 to 2015:**

- A “fight club” was started at the Corpus Christi SSLC that forced residents to fight each other.
- Texas entered into a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice after an investigation found extreme abuse, neglect and exploitation of the residents at the 13 SSLCs.
- A Lubbock SSLC staff beat a resident he was trying to shave and slammed his head into a cabinet.
- An employee at the Richmond SSLC kicked a resident in the legs, punched him in the neck and chest, and hit him on the head.
- A Mexia SSLC employee started a romantic relationship with a resident sending lewd photos.
- A resident wandered from the Corpus Christi SSLC and was found dead after drowning.