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Beleaguered Howe Developmental Center Remains Open Despite  
Additional Deaths and Ongoing Violations of Human Rights

*Twenty-Three Dead: Does Anyone Care?*

(CHICAGO, July 14, 2008) – The Howe Developmental Center remains open for business, despite the continued horrific conditions that led the Federal Government to decertify it over a year ago. Incredibly, Howe has lived on even though disturbing details cry out for closure: loss of millions of Medicaid dollars; seven investigative accounts by Equip for Equality describing in gruesome detail the deaths of 21 people and multiple instances of abysmal care; and the initiation of a United States Department of Justice investigation into violations of the Constitutional rights of the people living there.

Repeated efforts by Equip for Equality along with other advocacy organizations and people with disabilities, have failed to convince the State to close the institution. Instead, the State has opted to continue wasting hundreds of thousands more taxpayers' dollars on outside consultants hired to "fix" Howe – consultants who have since left the institution. Other extraordinary measures taken by the State to "fix" Howe, including independent monitors, redeployment of staff from other state run institutions to Howe, and contract nursing staff, have also failed to protect people from dying or to reform the institution.

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Recently, two more people have died at Howe. Those deaths remain under investigation by Equip for Equality's Abuse Investigation Unit. A preliminary review of one of those deaths reveals the same serious lapses in care found by the Abuse Investigation Unit in so many of the other medical records related to both people who have died and those who remain at Howe.

Illinois State Police investigations brought to light several instances of criminal conduct by staff and reports from the Office of the Inspector General for the Illinois Department of Human Services reveal ongoing dangerous instances of abuse and neglect including:

- An abuse investigation revealed that a staff person was wanted by police on a warrant for possession of cannabis and had several other criminal charges pending.
- An abuse investigation revealed that a staff member had an outstanding warrant for failure to appear in court on a marijuana-related criminal charge.
- Recent criminal charges brought against two staff members for engaging in a knife fight on Howe grounds result in convictions.
- Despite the assignment of one-to-one staff, an individual living at Howe was able to run away. Staff stated that he was fatigued due to working "five straight shifts."
- Neglect was substantiated against staff after an individual living at Howe was observed with a mouthful of cigarette butts, after which he was treated for possible nicotine poisoning.
- An individual was able to engage in self-abuse during his bath when Howe failed to have two staff assisting the individual as required by his service plan.
- An abuse investigation documents that staff failed to send an individual to the hospital, as instructed by the RN.
- A neglect investigation resulted in a substantiated finding against a physician for his failure to appropriately follow up on a possible urinary tract infection and failure to document in the individual's care plan.
- An investigation into possible neglect documented that two staff left 45-minutes before their shift ended.

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- An investigation of abuse revealed that, while staff was supposed to be in the same room at all times with an individual, the individual went into his room without staff and broke his arm.

“Howe is a toxic institution. How many more people have to die before the Governor shuts this down?” asks Zena Naiditch, President and CEO of Equip for Equality.

Equip for Equality calls for the State to take immediate action to implement a plan to close the Howe Developmental Center that will:

- Inform people currently living at Howe and their guardians about community based programs and settings that can meet their wants and needs;
- Expand the capacity of the community to meet the needs of individuals transitioning from Howe by ensuring that community programs and settings have necessary resources; and
- Allow for the safe transition of the people living at Howe to other settings of their choice

About Equip for Equality: A private, not-for-profit legal advocacy organization designated by the governor as the Protection and Advocacy System to safeguard the rights of people with physical and mental disabilities.

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