



Equip for Equality Report on Choate Developmental Center: **Why No One Should be Left Behind**

August 2023

In the spring of 2023, Governor Pritzker announced changes to Choate Developmental Center (Choate), a large state-run facility for people with developmental disabilities. He said people living there should have good care and better lives in the community. He said some people living in Choate will be moved to other places because they are not getting those things.

Equip for Equality agrees that changes are needed and we are happy that people will be moving out. But we are also very concerned some people may get left behind at Choate during the changes. A new report from Equip for Equality shows why we are concerned for these people and includes what we think should happen to the four units that might stay open Choate.

Equip for Equality spent over 2,000 hours over the past two years making many visits to Choate. We talked with people living there and staff, and looked at records and reports. We found many problems that are harmful to people living there. For example,

- People do not get enough therapy and services to help them move to community homes. This means they are stuck at the facility.
- Staff use restraints too much to control people, and people stated staff sometimes hurt them when in restraints.
- There are reports of staff verbally and physically abusing residents, making them feel unsafe.
- Many residents do not get needed medical care, supervision, and communication aids.
- Residents are not treated with dignity and respect.
- Equip for Equality talked to almost 100 people living at Choate who said they want to leave, but often they cannot or there are long delays.
- Some staff are afraid to report abuse and some lie to keep each other from getting fired.

In 2005, Equip for Equality also spent a lot of time at Choate and found many of the same problems. We told the government about the problems. Then in 2009, the United States Department of Justice did their own monitoring and found many of the same kinds of problems. These old reports showed that people at Choate were living in an unsafe facility and not getting the services they needed to be able to live in homes in their community. Very little has changed since then.

When the Governor announced some people would move out of Choate, he also asked the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine to look at four other units at Choate to help decide what should happen. The School of Medicine made its own report. After reading it, Equip for Equality believes it did not say why the units should stay open even though there are so many problems.

Because these bad problems have been happening for at least 20 years, Equip for Equality says the Illinois government needs to stop placing people at Choate and help everyone with developmental disabilities living there move out.

In conclusion, Equip for Equality wants the Illinois government to:

1. Stop sending new people to live at Choate, except for the unit for people with criminal charges or findings, until a new, safer unit opens somewhere else.
2. Make a plan to make a new unit for people with criminal charges or findings, in a safe place that can fully meet the needs of people living there.
3. Keep working to help people move out of Choate into places they choose and with the help they need. If people have court orders that make them be in Choate, they should also move to a better place.
4. While people wait to move, give people at Choate therapy and services to help them succeed in the community.
5. While people wait to move, make Choate safer by adding security cameras, better reporting of abuse and neglect, hiring staff, and improving individualized care.
6. Have outside groups like Equip for Equality monitor Choate during this time when people are moving out. The State agency in charge of developmental disabilities and safety also need to make sure Choate is fixing problems and keeping people safe.
7. The State public health agency should also help monitor Choate, like they have done when other state-run facilities had problems.