



PHILLIP KASSEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Supreme Judicial Court

MENTAL HEALTH LEGAL ADVISORS COMMITTEE

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November 18, 2020

Mayor Jeannette A. McCarthy
City of Waltham
610 Main Street
Waltham, MA 02452
VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL (mayor@city.waltham.ma.us)

Dear Mayor McCarthy,

The Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee is an independent agency of the judiciary that works to enhance and protect the rights of persons with mental health concerns throughout the Commonwealth. Our clients include people who have suffered abuse in institutions such as the erstwhile Walter E. Fernald Developmental Center. I write in support of the November 8, 2020 letter you received urging you to take immediate action to move the planned Waltham Lions Club holiday light show from the Fernald grounds to another location. The planned event will have the opposite impact from what I assume you intend for a celebration in the season of light.

I understand that the Fernald property is owned by the City of Waltham and can appreciate the impetus to put it to use. I can also imagine that you chose this sprawling ex-campus because it offers logistical advantages for the outdoor event planned. But a city's holiday celebration ought to be a source of joy for the entire community, particularly in these divisive times and in the midst of a spiking pandemic that is generating unprecedented stresses in our communities.

This cannot happen at the planned site. Many community members cannot overlook Fernald's disgraceful history for very good reason. Walter Fernald himself was a proponent of eugenics and forced sterilizations, which occurred at the institution. Students were fed radioactive oatmeal by esteemed Harvard and MIT professors in what they called experiments. And innocents were imprisoned in squalid conditions for much of their unhappy lives.

Siting a celebration of peace and good will at a place that evokes this virulent form of dehumanization, particularly in the face of outraged protest, gives new meaning to the word incongruous. Many members of your community are aware of and disgusted by or were personally affected, perhaps through family members, by the Fernald Center's horrors. More than 1500 persons to date have signed an online petition. These people, and others who learn of the controversy stirred by the citing of the holiday light show, will not participate in the planned event. That is reason enough to hold it elsewhere.

We live in times in which it is important to inspire unity, not division. We urge you to find another location for the Lions Club light show. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyrel Floyd". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "F".

Executive Director

CC: Tyrel Floyd (Tyrel.floyd@lionsclubs.org); Waltham Lions Club (lionswaltham@gmail.com)