

MEDIA RELEASE

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Vigil for Remembrance and Resistance at Fernald School Holiday Event by Disability Advocates Today

When: Friday, November 27, 5:00

Where: Entrance to the former Fernald School, 200 Trapelo Road, Waltham

Disability advocates will gather for a vigil at the entrance to the former Fernald School today, where “A holiday light show supported by the City of Waltham will further erase the memory of the abuse meted out on persons with disabilities and the civil rights movement that closed this institution,” said activist Chris Hoeh. “We respect that the Lions need to fundraise, but the use of this site, this way, cannot happen year after year. We need a museum acknowledging the history of the site, remembrance of how fragile the rights, the dignity of persons with disabilities always is, and to value the ongoing struggle being waged by activists to protect the dignity of the disabled.”

Three years after promising a group of high school students that this history would be represented at the site, one of the students, Zachary Sherman, remarks that “no formal plan for museum has been established. However, the Lions Club swiftly received approval for this light show and new power lines have been added. While Mayor McCarthy has not even responded to letters from the community, a petition with over 2000 signatures, and a protest outside City Hall last Friday.” He continues, “until the Fernald is used appropriately, the mere thought of using it for light show is unconscionable.”

A coalition of advocates, including the Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL), the Arc of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change, and the Metrowest Center for Independent Living have joined with advocates in Waltham to support the established goal of building a museum on the site.

“We will leaflet at the site tonight, letting attendees know that the focus at the former Fernald should be disability rights, not holiday lights,” said BCIL director Bill Henning. Advocates have noted that Waltham is a city with many beautiful landscapes, all of which could be repurposed for a holiday light show.

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