

Arson new blow to the retarded

What's next for our mentally retarded?

When I heard the very sad news of the 26 Dumont Ave., Dongan Hills, fire that someone set to the building to keep our mentally retarded boys and girls and adults out of the neighborhood, it made my blood boil. This building was to be used by our own mentally retarded in the Community Board 2 area.

I have been fighting now for some 20 years in seeing that some day our boys and girls would be given the rights to live just as all of us have our rights. I am not writing this letter as a Community Board 2 member, but as a dedicated community leader fighting for all the mentally retarded on Staten Island.

We cannot point our finger to the Dongan Hills area, because it could have been someone else who might have been paid to set this fire. But it surely gives the Dongan Hills area a black eye.

This building was to be used as a State Borough Developmental Service Office, which would provide counselling, therapy and recreation for our community's retarded residents. No one was going to sleep overnight in the 26 Dumont Ave., site. Most of the services were to be provided by caseworkers who visit clients within their homes and report back to the 26 Dumont Ave. building. Yes, some of the residents did object strenuously to the site, and they have that right, but on the other hand our boys and girls and adults were not given the chance to show the community that they would make good.

The burning of this building will only lead me and others to press and fight that much more for our handicapped children until they have their day in the sun.

We parents know that our boys and girls were born with two strikes against them, and we resent the third strike against them by the burning of this facility. We do hope that people will come forward if they know of any information leading to the cause of the fire and that the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department investigate the possible violations of federal civil rights statutes stemming from this fire.

We should all pray that this doesn't happen again here in Dongan Hills or anywhere else on Staten Island.

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