

# Retarded get plenty of candidate sympathy

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

They told the Association for Retarded Citizens pretty much what they wanted to hear.

And the 21 candidates sounded alike — against institutionalization and in favor of group homes.

"It's a Mary Poppins question. Yes, of course," answered one impatient candidate as ARC of Oakland County held a candidates night Monday in Birmingham.

The candidates for state Legislature and the County Board of Commissioners almost outnumbered the audience of 30 in the library basement.

"DO YOU feel local communities should have any control over group home site selection? If so, how should it be?" ARC asked.

State Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, said, "I support the Department of Mental Health efforts to place homes in our area. To my detriment, I've supported group homes in raucous meetings."

Cruce cited four House bills he opposes which would set population limits and establish local site selection committees. His 16th Senate District includes Troy, Birmingham and part of the Royal Oak area.

His Democratic opponent, Martha Kinney of Pleasant Ridge, said, "Unfortunately, there is a still a lot of bigotry out there" against group homes. She said the Department of Mental Health should select sites.

DEMOCRAT Martha Blom, seeking the 17th District Senate seat, agreed with Kinney. "The less local control, the better," added Blom of West Bloomfield.

Incumbent Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, did not attend. Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, a veteran of more than 20 years in Lansing, said, "I was there when it was passed" — meaning the policy of placing the mildly retarded in group homes in residential neighborhoods rather than in state institutions.

"De-institutionalization was a very, very good step in Michigan. We did the right thing," Faxon said. His Republican opponent, Frank Brock of Lathrup Village, did not attend. The 15th Senate District covers the Farmington area, the Southfield

area, part of the Royal Oak area, Novi and Wilmet.

REP. MAXINE Berman, D-Southfield, said she "vehemently opposes such bills" to allow local governments to restrict group home sites.

"When I purchased a condo, I don't recall being told where I as a Jewish woman, or I as a single woman, could locate," she said. "Within months after group homes have opened, the problems disappear."

Her Republican opponent in the 64th House District, Sheila Molnar, did not attend.

Rep. Judith Miller, R-Birmingham, said, "I've always been a strong supporter of group homes."

But she said state officials should "communicate with the communities" before locating a group home in order to head off potential trouble. She wants the location process "fine-tuned."

Her Democratic opponent in the 65th House District, Joan Hill of Bloomfield Hills, did not attend.

WILFRED WEBB, Democratic challenger in the 66th House District, said, "It's too bad this question has to be asked. They (retarded) have a right to live where they want."

"Local communities should not have the right to control locations any more than where I locate," said Webb, a Hazel Park resident. A retired school superintendent, Webb served one term in the House before he was defeated in 1984 by Rep. Gregory Gruse, R-Madison Heights.

Gruse did not attend. The district includes southeastern Troy.

ARC CHARGED that many retarded children whose parents care for them at home "are either under-served or denied access to the opportunities which those within the system receive."

It asked whether the "never-institutionalized" should be given the same level of services, and whether candidates approved of "the current project of collecting data so as to develop a 'strategic plan' for expanding services?"

Democrat Blom of the 17th Senate District said the state "should not differentiate between those institutionalized and the never-institutionalized."

Democrat Kinney of the 16th Senate District advocated "equal treatment."

Sen. Cruce, incumbent Republican in the 16th, said, "The family unit is important to foster. A strategic plan has to be appropriate." Cruce added that more funds would have to be procured on the "cost effectiveness" of services.

REP. Berman, D-Southfield, said it's proper for the state to subsidize parents who keep children at home, adding, "More services must be given to those people who live at home."

On the question of a strategic plan, she said, "We collect data on everything else."

Rep. Miller, R-Birmingham, said, "A strategic plan is very important when you have too few dollars."

While it would be nice to promise ARC members "everything you want," she said services could be expanded "as dollars are available."

Democrat Webb of the 66th House District said, "I can't believe we have to ask this question." His answer was "certainly."

Webb added that "many people

vote for spending without voting for funds" — a reference to his 1983 support of the state personal income

tax increase and his subsequent defeat at the polls. Replies of Oakland County Board of Commissioners candidates will be covered in Monday's edition.

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