



Madison County Mental Retardation Board drops 'the R word' from its name

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[HUNTSVILLE, Alabama](#) - The Madison County Mental Retardation Board has dropped "mental retardation" from its name.

The agency is now referring to itself as the Madison County 310 Board after Act 310, a 1975 state law that gave local communities control over providing services to people with mental retardation. The Huntsville City Council signed off on the name change last week.

"We just need to have a name that's more reflective of the times," said City Councilman Will Culver, who sponsored the resolution. "The name is a little antiquated; it just doesn't sound current."

Madison County 310 Board Executive Director Jo Poates said that while "mental retardation" is still a medical diagnosis, affected families and people who work in the field prefer the term "intellectual disability."

"'Mental retardation' has got a stigma attached to it," Poates said Thursday. "We debated for several months about what to call ourselves and just settled on something generic. The (310 Board) name doesn't tell you much, but people seem to find us."

The agency, which falls under the umbrella of the Alabama Department of Mental Health's [Division of Development Disabilities](#), serves more than 300 people who qualify for Medicaid assistance. Another 200 or so Madison County residents remain on a waiting list for help.

Poates said the local agency generally serves people 15 and older with IQs below 70 and deficits in daily living skills.

Former state Mental Health Commissioner John Houston gave local mental retardation boards blanket approval to drop "the R word" from their names in August 2009, when the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation became the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

The Madison County 310 Board receives funding from various sources, including the state, Huntsville City Council and Madison County Commission. The county appoints six of its 11 board members; the city appoints five.

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