

To: Members of the House Health Care Committee

I'm writing to you today with regard to the recent RFP on providing Inpatient Psychiatric facilities for children and adolescents. I have read the submission from SVMC and would like to make the following comments:

I would first like to say that I fully support this RFP and the funding of this facility. The youth of the state of Vermont will truly benefit from its completion. However, I also need to say that completion of this one facility is not enough for several reasons. First, there are an insufficient number of such beds in the state to accommodate the numbers of young people that need them. Twelve more is not insignificant, but it is not nearly enough. Next, this proposal will locate the beds in the southern end of the state while a significant number of our youth reside far to the north and northeast. Limiting the available beds to one area will put an inordinate strain on the families of those making use of them. Daily trips to visit loved ones or attend medical meetings severely disrupts the personal and working lives of the families.

My recommendation would be that the funding for this RFP be completed and the review of the plans be begun. The facility should be constructed as soon as is feasible. However, the effort should not end there. Additional RFP's must be requested and ways found to help other institutions, such as the UVM Medical Ctr, meet the requirements of those RFP's. Creative funding methods might be needed to make additional proposals viable but the overwhelming needs of our children should outway any hardships faced by being creative. Reaching out to collaborate with our neighboring states to establish new bed capacity at Dartmouth or the Albany Medical Ctr should be considered and seriously investigated.

Throughout whatever process you as a committee choose, it is imperative that the family members of those you are attempting to serve have a voice at the table. Include us in your discussions, make time for testimony from family members and make sure the solution or solutions you opt for include everyone affected by the rising mental illness in Vermont. There are thousands of affected family members that suffer along with their loved ones and they can be a resource for understanding where the system's pitfalls lie and offer meaningful suggestions on how to avoid the pitfalls. Please make use of them.

Sincerely,

Charles R. Siler
President NAMI-Vermont