

State of Vermont

House of Representatives



Montpelier, Vermont

Joint House Resolution

J.R.H. 1

Joint resolution relating to the history and legacy of the Vermont State Hospital and the preservation of its cemetery

Offered by: Representatives Donahue of Northfield, Batchelor of Derby, Beyor of Highgate, Bissonnette of Winooski, Botzow of Pownal, Branagan of Georgia, Burke of Brattleboro, Buxton of Tunbridge, Carr of Brandon, Christie of Hartford, Consejo of Sheldon, Dakin of Chester, Deen of Westminster, Devereux of Mount Holly, Dickinson of St. Albans Town, Donaghy of Poultney, Ellis of Waterbury, Emmons of Springfield, Frank of Underhill, French of Randolph, Grad of Moretown, Haas of Rochester, Head of South Burlington, Hebert of Vernon, Hooper of Montpelier, Jerman of Essex, Jewett of Ripton, Kitzmiller of Montpelier, Koch of Barre Town, Lenes of Shelburne, Lewis of Berlin, Lippert of Hinesburg, Martin of Springfield, Martin of Wolcott, Masland of Thetford, McFaun of Barre Town, Mrowicki of Putney, Myers of Essex, O'Brien of Richmond, O'Sullivan of Burlington, Poirier of Barre City, Potter of Clarendon, Pugh of South Burlington, Rachelson of Burlington, Russell of Rutland City, Savage of Swanton, Shaw of Pittsford, Shaw of Derby, Stevens of Waterbury, Strong of Albany, Stuart of Brattleboro, Taylor of Barre City, Till of Jericho, Townsend of Randolph, Townsend of South Burlington, Trieber of Rockingham, Turner of Milton, Waite-Simpson of Essex, and Wizowaty of Burlington

Whereas, in 1888, the trustees of the Vermont Asylum for the Insane in Brattleboro (renamed the Brattleboro Retreat in 1892 to avoid confusion with the Waterbury facility) reported that the facility was beyond its designed capacity, and Dr. Don D. Grout, the member from Stowe and a future superintendent of the Vermont State Asylum for the Insane (renamed the Vermont State Hospital for the Insane in 1898), introduced legislation that became Act 94, "An act providing for the care, custody and treatment of the insane poor and insane criminals of the state," and

Whereas, the state purchased 500 acres of land in Waterbury for the new facility, and after initial construction, the first 25 patients arrived by train from Brattleboro on August 8, 1891, and

Whereas, during its 120 years of service, the Vermont State Hospital played a powerful role in the lives of many Vermonters, including many patients and staff, and

Whereas, from early on, the Vermont State Hospital confronted a continuing struggle to secure sufficient financing to provide the best quality of

care, and in recent decades, it had been recognized that the facilities in Waterbury no longer allowed for state-of-the-art care, and the existing hospital needed to be closed, and

Whereas, in November 1927, and again at the end of August 2011, the staff and patients at the Vermont State Hospital undertook extraordinary measures to respond to devastating floods, and

Whereas, the severe damage that the Vermont State Hospital sustained in Tropical Storm Irene required an immediate relocation or replacement of services previously provided at the Vermont State Hospital, and

Whereas, as a new chapter in mental health care in Vermont begins, it should be one that integrates mental health care with other health care services, focuses on community supports and treatment close to home, avoids unnecessary hospitalization, and never abandons those with mental health needs, and

Whereas, with the closure of the historic Vermont State Hospital Waterbury campus, it is important to remember those individuals buried at the hospital's cemetery in use from the hospital's inception until 1912 and which includes a memorial stone with an inscription that reads:

This beautiful knoll overlooking the grounds of the Vermont State Hospital is matched in splendor only by the twenty or so residents of the Hospital who were buried here between 1891 and 1912. May their spirits soar, you are remembered, and

Whereas, the preservation of this cemetery and of the memory of those individuals is of lasting importance, and

Whereas, the names of those buried there have been gathered in the past, and may still be able to be located and preserved so that these individuals will not be left unknown, and

Whereas, there is evidence that at least two and perhaps more patients from the Vermont State Hospital were buried at different locations on the grounds in unmarked graves that are likely to never be identified which would be a grievous indication of past indifference to the lives of these individuals, a practice that should never again be permitted to occur in this state, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly observes the powerful role that the Vermont State Hospital played in the history of mental health treatment in Vermont and requests the State to maintain and preserve perpetually the hospital's cemetery, and be it further

Resolved: That the Department of Mental Health is requested to seek to identify from past records those individuals who were buried at different locations, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Commissioner of Mental Health and the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services.