



STATE OF VERMONT  
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** House Corrections & Institutions Committee  
**FROM:** Secretary Al Gobeille  
**DATE:** Friday, February 16, 2018  
**SUBJECT:** 12 Bed Temporary Forensic Facility

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The Agency of Human Services proposes creating forensic bed capacity to help address the flow issues within the level 1 psychiatric inpatient system and when appropriate, diverting individuals who are court ordered for an inpatient evaluation from emergency departments. The proposal that was recommended in the Governor's FY2019 proposed budget is to modify and expand the Alpha Unit at the Northwest State Correctional Facility. Both the capital costs and operating costs for approximately three months were included in the recommended budget.

We appreciate the willingness of the committee to consider this proposal, as well as discuss how we can better address the flow issues within our mental health system. We are available to discuss and answer any questions from the committee.

*Q: Who will be housed there?*

A: The population served will be individuals with criminal charges combined with mental health issues. These individuals presented through the court system have a wide variety of clinical needs and although we cannot address all of the needs, it will help alleviate some of the pressures. The individuals housed in this proposal are individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system and in the custody of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) Commissioner and require hospital level of care. The population will include court orders for competency or sanity determination, those already determined not competent to stand trial, or individuals who are already serving a sentence and have developed a need for hospital level of care while in prison.

*Q: How are they routed to the facility?*

A: As noted above, it depends on the condition of the individual. However, they will typically be routed through court order via sheriff transport or transport from an inpatient psychiatric facility if the proposed forensic facility is deemed more appropriate. That transport will also occur via sheriff transport following the DMH guidelines for sheriff transportations. Individuals may also be transported from other correctional facilities, also by sheriff transport.

*Q: Who manages it?*

A: The proposed facility is offering hospital level of care and will therefore be managed by the Department of Mental Health.

*Q: Who budgets for it?*

A: The operating expenses will be budgeted out of DMH's budget. However, some costs may be shared between DOC and DMH (for example, meals, building costs, etc.) The Administration's proposed FY2019 budget includes \$1.5M in general fund for approximately three months of operating expenses. Additionally, the cost for updating the Alpha Unit has been recommended in this year's Capital Budget (approximately \$2.9M).

*Q: Will it be able to draw down any federal funds (Medicaid)?*

A: No. This facility will not be able to draw down Medicaid dollars.

*Q: How will it relieve the pressures on emergency rooms and meet the needs of the state?*

A: While we know the capacity we create will not address all the needs of this population, it will help alleviate some of the pressures. The facility will remove most, if not all, court orders for inpatient evaluations that now go directly to emergency departments. Instead of going to emergency departments, these patients will be directly admitted to the facility. Those individuals will not use the other level 1 or psychiatric inpatient beds, essentially freeing up 12 beds in our current system. These patients typically require longer lengths of stay and in having a separate facility for their evaluations and treatment, it will provide more access to inpatient beds for Vermonters.

*Q: Where is the proposed location?*

A: In the Alpha Unit at the Northwest Correctional Facility. We (AHS, DMH, DOC) are determining the changes needed to a small unit to create the proposed 12-bed capacity. This setting would be a temporary setting until a more permanent and larger capacity setting can be established, ideally a forensic psychiatric hospital as Vermont is one of the only states without one.