



Dear Vermont Lawmaker:

On Thursday Morning, Department for Children and Families (DCF) Commissioner Sean Brown presented the outline of a proposal by the DCF to outsource the work of the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Facility to a private contractor: Becket Academy, Inc. Under this plan, the State of Vermont would pay for the construction of a facility, to be owned and run by Becket, and to which the State could then ship the children who would otherwise receive care at Woodside.

What do recent privatizations tell us about the viability of this troubling plan?

- The State abrogated its responsibility to keep its inmates safe to the morally bankrupt private prison company CoreCivic. The result? 176 inmates infected with COVID-19;
- After Hurricane Irene, the State said that all the Vermonters who would have received care at the Vermont State Hospital could be handled by privately run “community partners.” What happened? A mental health crisis that has seen vulnerable Vermonters piling up in packed emergency rooms; and
- The State of Vermont paid for the construction of 12 “Level-1” acute care beds at the Brattleboro retreat, at cost of millions of dollars. What happened only a short time later? The Retreat came back to the state,

requesting an additional injection of millions of dollars, and threatening that—if they didn't receive them—they would have to cease operations.

How many times must we repeat the same mistake?

Should we really be gambling with the welfare of Vermont's children?

A few short months ago, the Administration didn't think so. Under Al Gobeille's leadership, DCF said that the current Woodside building should be replaced with a state-owned "multi-wing building that could accommodate varying levels of security." When Secretary Gobeille was replaced by Secretary Mike Smith, suddenly the Administration said it had no confidence in Woodside.

Perhaps that was why the Administration moved Woodside's program to three different locations in three

months, installing a rotating cast of three different directors in the same time frame. Rather than consult with the nationally recognized experts on Woodside's staff, the Administration threatened closure, causing many members of this excellent team to resign in fear for their livelihoods.

It's time to end this artificially created chaos.

The Administration must:

- Work with our members to create the Woodside the State wants, with whatever treatment protocols they want, in a new, state-owned building that allows for that treatment;

- Hire a real leader for the facility, who has the behavioral health background required by recent court settlements, and
- Take this ill-conceived privatization off the table

If we can use taxpayer money to build a facility for a private corporation, why can't we build one for ourselves?

Our members stand ready to collaborate with the management to create a treatment program for our vulnerable young Vermonters that all of us can be proud of.

Respectfully,

Steve Howard

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