

Memorandum

To: Joint Justice Oversight Committee
From: Sean Brown, DCF Commissioner
Re: Woodside Update
Date: August 6, 2020

Current Status of Woodside

The Woodside facility has been challenged by a combination of recent factors including changes in leadership at the facility, loss of staff due to its pending closure, and three de-stabilizing moves in a short period of time stemming from the state's COVID-19 response. All of this has contributed to the facility's current state of instability, despite DCF's commitment to change the culture and practice at Woodside. AHS/DCF has determined that Woodside does not presently have sufficiently robust programming to receive new youth admissions.

DCF is working to secure an alternate, interim placement for the one remaining youth currently residing at Woodside. We are in the process of exploring all available placement options and hope to have a plan in place very soon.

Due to incidents at the Woodside facility, both past and present, that led to former federal litigation, we are looking for alternatives to Woodside placements. Despite the implementation and extensive staff training in the use of Safe Crisis Management, an evidence-based model of de-escalation, we feel alternative placement options are the best decision for the youth requiring this secure level of care.

For youth who may be ordered to a secure facility pursuant to 33 VSA 5291(a), DCF is actively seeking alternatives to Woodside. We are pursuing a secure community-based program that would involve Family Services workers and law enforcement staffing youth in need of a short-term secure placement while a longer-term therapeutic placement can be found, either in- or out-of-state, that will ensure appropriate programming, care and safety for the youth.

Roadmap Going Forward

While DCF had hoped to implement the long-term plan agreed upon in the Settlement Agreement with Disability Rights Vermont, we are pursuing a number of alternatives to Woodside that hold promise. We plan to highlight the most viable of these alternatives in the legislative report required by Act 120 (Section A.29) due in August when the legislature re-convenes. It would be premature to present these alternatives at this time since we are still in the process of negotiating contracts and services, however, we do plan to include these initiatives in our SFY 21 addendum budget presentation at the end of August.

