

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: FW: [External] Testimony on Governor's Budget: new psychiatric facility

Hi,

My name is Wichie Artu. I am a member of Vermont's Racial Equity Task Force, of Brattleboro Memorial Hospital's Council on Racial Equity, and of the BIPOC Caucus at the Root Social Justice Center.

I am writing to you as a Vermonter who is concerned about the Governor's budget proposal to construct a new psychiatric facility - which aims to replace the smaller Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence. The following are my biggest concerns:

- The unprecedented use of coercive tactics including restraints, seclusion, and involuntary medication
- The creation/expansion of a prison-like facility to provide health care

We KNOW incarceration does not address the root causes of instability for our community members that require mental health services: suicidality, trauma, lack of community support, poverty, etc; instead, it makes them worse! I implore you to consider pushing to fund facilities/services that are more appropriate and humane. We should aim to provide quality of life for our Vermonters who have been psychiatrically labeled.

AND, a few things to take into consideration, in a time where there is much momentum for racial equity:

- BIPOC are more likely to be incarcerated
- BIPOC are more likely to receive poor quality mental health treatment
- BIPOC are more likely to face these root-cause issues (e.g. poverty)

Again, I urge you to rethink the methods by which this budget is meaning to provide support to our psychiatrically-labeled community members. Instead of using force and harm, I recommend allocating these resources to methods that WE KNOW WORK: peer respites, community supports, and ending homelessness.

Thank you,
~Wichie~