



February 26, 2021

To the House Health Care Committee, House Committee on Corrections and Institutions, and House Appropriations Committee;

We at Out in the Open, a Vermont-based organization by and for our rural LGBTQ+ communities, are concerned about the proposed new 16-bed “secure residential” facility to replace the current 7-bed Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence (TCR), budgeted at \$11.6 million dollars. Facilities like the one proposed, are not and historically have not been places of healing for members of our community, in fact quite the opposite is true.

The ways that the psychiatric system has pathologized LGBTQ people over time has been well documented. Though homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) after 1974, diagnoses including “sexual orientation disturbance,” and then “ego-dystonic homosexuality” and “gender identity disorder” were introduced in subsequent years. Labels like these-- including some present in the current DSM-5-- have been and continue to be weaponized against LGBTQ people; particularly our trans community members and those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

While it is extremely disconcerting that LGBTQ people are statistically more likely to experience suicidal thoughts than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, this is not best solved by pathologizing and incarcerating our community members when they are in distress. Incarceration does not address suicidality, poverty, trauma, or structural marginalization. Instead, it increases all of these things-- whether it looks like psychiatric incarceration or criminal justice incarceration.

This new facility will simply perpetuate trauma in our community by using solitary confinement, restraint, and forced drugging-- a violent practice that many survivors describe as torture. The mental health supports and healing that people need, including our LGBTQ+ community members, are not going to happen in a place that allows such inhumane acts. As a state we have the opportunity to create new solutions to our communities’ needs. These solutions must be led by those with lived experience, people who are neurodivergent, psychiatrically labeled,

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psychiatrically disabled, and mad. The state has the opportunity to move resources into community care solutions, not continued trauma.

We at Out in the Open call on Vermont legislators not to fund expensive, ineffective and trauma-producing incarceration facilities like the Middlesex replacement, and instead direct funding to peer respites, community supports, and long-term housing.

Best,

Ain Thompson, Eva Westheimer, & Jo Lum
Out in the Open