

TESTIMONY of MIKE MAUGHAN

Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee

August 28, 2024

~ 10 minutes

- Good afternoon, my name is **Mike Maughan**. I am a 31-year-old resident of Swanton who has lived in Vermont for the past 12 years. I am also the owner-operator of a property management company in Franklin County.
- **I grew up in the foster care system and resided in a juvenile detention facility as a teen.**
- It is my goal to use my lived experience to advocate for **safe and effective systems and programs of care for youth.**
- From age 15 to 17, I lived at Northwestern Academy, a juvenile facility in Coal Township, Pennsylvania, after having lived in numerous foster homes, group homes, and youth shelters.
- My experience in a residential treatment facility was about **containment and not about treatment.**
- The culture of the residential treatment center included:
 - Exposure to **overwhelming violence, gang culture, and overt white supremacy.**
 - A **punitive culture that lacked any affection.** The staff there often told the youth, **“I am going home today and you are not.”**
 - A **lack of common sense** and an inability to see things from a child’s perspective.
- Because of the lack of care I received, I live with a **lifelong mistrust of anyone offering help.**
- I also live with a **traumatic brain injury** that occurred at the center when I was caught in the middle of an altercation and struck in the head by a flying chair.
- I believe that secure, **compliance-based facilities** like the one you are proposing **will never be successful.**

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- These facilities may start out therapeutic, but they **settle into command and control** and eventually **breed violent and punitive cultures for both staff and youth.**
- I fear this facility will be a **recreation of the Woodside facility.**
- The Vermont Agency of Human Services has yet to prove to the people of Vermont **that it can appropriately regulate a youth facility and address any concerns that arise.**
- Yes, the state needs a **safe and compassionate place to bring youth in trouble,** but this institutional approach is not it.
- I respectfully ask the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee to **reconsider this design and approach.**
- Thanks for your time. I welcome any questions.