

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jane Kitchel, Senate Committee on Appropriations, Chair
Diane Lanpher, House Committee on Appropriations, Chair

FROM: Emily Hawes, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health

DATE: January 13, 2023

SUBJECT: Youth Inpatient Facility

In June of 2022, the Department of Mental Health posted an RFP to solicit proposals from qualified health care organizations connected or affiliated with a general medical facility to provide inpatient psychiatric services for children and youth under the age of 18 years. The mission was to diversify capacity for inpatient psychiatric services for Vermont youth (under age 18). Additional capacity will reduce wait times for inpatient bed availability, directly impacting access to care, which is integral to successful mental health treatment outcomes. Additionally, the Department wishes to reduce the number of youth waiting in an emergency department for an inpatient bed to become available (this is often referred to as “boarding”). Finally, the Department seeks to integrate mental health into healthcare by building psychiatric inpatient capacity within a hospital setting. This will allow individuals to have their medical needs managed while they receive the mental health care they need and reduce the number of individuals who are currently denied admission at the Brattleboro Retreat due to medical needs that cannot be managed in a non-medical hospital setting.

In July of 2022, Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) in Bennington, Vermont was the sole bidder. In the proposal, SVMC expressed a plan to develop a 10-12 inpatient mental health unit for adolescents ages 12-17. SVMC included cost estimates to launch and ramp up at \$10.5 million over 2 years, which included renovation and recruiting expenses. The plan would occur in four phases: Feasibility Study; Preconstruction; Construction and Staff Recruitment; and Launch and Ramp Up.

In November of 2022, SVMC entered into a contract with the State of Vermont’s Department of Mental Health to begin the feasibility study. The feasibility study will evaluate the prospects of creating an inpatient psychiatric unit for youth at SVMC. The study will determine the feasibility of the planned scope of work and a final estimated cost. The contract for the feasibility study concludes on March 31, 2023, and the Department intends to make the report public upon receipt.

SVMC estimated that the next phases of the project will take approximately sixteen (16) months, but note that ongoing disruptions to supply chains from the COVID-19 pandemic may also impact the timeline. The subsequent phases will also require that SVMC acquire all approvals, including a [Certificate of Need \(CON\)](#) from the Green Mountain Care Board, as well as any processes required by [Act 167](#). In order to begin the next phases of the work, which would require either a new or amended contract, the State would need to have the funding secured. The State’s current request for funding in the Budget Adjustment Act (BAA) is to secure the funding to enter into the contract to begin the next phases of work.

CC:

Adam Greshin, Commissioner, Finance and Management

Richard Donahey, CFO, Agency of Human Services

Shannon Thompson, Department of Mental Health, Financial Director

Nicole DiStasio, Department of Mental Health, Director of Policy