

Green Mountain Youth Center

Joint Legislative Justice Committee

Matthew Bernstein, Child, Youth, and Family Advocate

The Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate – Title 33 VSA, Chapter 32

- State office but independent (§ 3201)
- Youth- and Family-Centered - “*shall* promote reforms” (§ 3202)
- “Review current systems to assess to what extent children and youths ... receive humane and dignified treatment at all times, including ... the child’s or youth’s personal dignity, right to privacy, and right to appropriate health care and education in accordance with State and federal law” (§ 3203)
- Access to information and facilities (§ 3207)
- Collaboration (§ 3203)

Clarifying the OCYFA Position on Locked Facilities

“Our Office understands that the safety of our communities sometimes requires that a youth be in a locked environment. However, we believe that the number of young people requiring this highest level of security is small, usually between 0 and 10 at any given time. DCF has not presented data to explain its calculations of the size and treatment modalities of any future facilities”

- 2023 OCYFA Annual Report, p. 45

Clarifying the Role of the OCYFA in GMYC

- The OCYFA is designed to be inside the decision-making process, to be consulted *before* key decisions are made
- Our office brings an important voice that centers children, youth, and families in the core decision-making processes for child welfare and youth justice
- We help make a stronger, safer, more supportive juvenile justice system for youth, DCF, and taxpayers
- Our recommendation on GMYC: pause the building process until essential questions are answered

Essential Questions

- How much is GMYC projected to cost, in total, each year?
- What are the treatment needs of the youth GMYC will serve?
- What oversight and accountability is planned for GMYC?
- How will education be handled at GMYC?
- Will GMYC hold both pre- and post-adjudicated youth? Youth 18+? All genders?
- What investments are planned for communities to prevent justice involvement? Do they equal or exceed the costs of GMYC? Is there a comprehensive plan?

How much will GMYC cost?

- Current all-inclusive annual cost at Red Clover (4 beds): \$1.6M per bed per year
- Current all-inclusive annual cost at West River Haven (3 beds): \$1.4M / bed / year
- Projected all-inclusive annual cost at GMYC: ???

How much will GMYC cost?

- \$25.9 M “Schematic Design Estimate total” as of July 6, 2026
- What about programming?
- Sentinel contract ends December 31, 2026. Is there a new contract in development?
- What other costs will the General Fund support, in addition to these?
- Locked facilities are not eligible for Medicaid or Title IV-E federal reimbursement funds

Who will GMYC serve?

- Act 4 of 2025 required DCF to report on “the treatment needs of the youth placed” at Red Clover, our current 4 bed locked facility.
- To our knowledge, this information has not been reported.
- Who are youth in DCF custody who wind up in locked facilities? Where are they from? What supports might have helped them avoid detention? How can we build these systems for future children?
- This information seems essential to have before deciding on number of beds, layout, other design elements.

Who will GMYC serve?

- Will GMYC hold both pre- and post-adjudicated youth? Are there due process issues here?
- Will GMYC hold all genders or just males?
- How much fluidity will exist between the “short-term stabilization” and the “secure treatment” programs within GMYC?
- What stepdowns are available for youth ready to leave secure settings?

Education at GMYC

- Who is/will be responsible for education and special education at GMYC?
- What are the educational outcomes of the youth who have been to Red Clover?
- How many young people at Red Clover have had IEPs? What have been the educational challenges Red Clover has faced? How will these inform GMYC?

Accountability

- How will accountability at GMYC will be different than Woodside?
- During Woodside, DCF's FSD's Residential Licensing and Special Investigations Unit identified violations in the treatment of youth there. The system "worked" but was insufficient to prevent harm.
- As we understand it, there are no proposed changes to this regulatory system under GMYC.
- DCF originally touted our office, the OCYFA, as an important oversight mechanism. We do not have sufficient resources to monitor GMYC.

Data

- DCF must reform its data practices, not just its data systems.
- For example, DCF is currently not able to accurately and responsively separate out youth charged with delinquencies from youth charged as youthful offenders.
 - DC: “Temporary or ongoing DCF custody AND youth is adjudicated as a delinquent or youthful offender.” (see SSMIS manual excerpt in Sources)
- Our concern is that DCF itself is not able to see the needs of youth in its custody and its facilities across its juvenile justice system
- Accurate data is crucial for building upstream, responsive systems and supports

Serving 18+ at GMYC: Federal Law

- “The JJDPA ... does not bar the housing of youth processed in the juvenile (delinquency) system over age 18 with those under age 18.”
- “PREA’s sight, sound, and physical separation requirement applies only to adult facilities. Age segregation is not a federal requirement for youth in juvenile facilities.”
- Integrating young people of differing ages, needs, and maturity is what DCF does every day.
- Emerging adults ages 18-24 need responsive programming, as do all young people.

Sources

- OCYFA [2023 Annual Report](#)
- Columbia Justice Lab, “[Raising the Upper Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction: Implications of Federal JJDPA and PREA Requirements](#),” December 2019
- Vermont [Act 4 of 2025](#)
- “Vermont High-End System of Care Facilitation: Juvenile Justice Placement Facility Oversight,” NCJFCJ (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges), March 30, 2026 Draft Literature Review, p. 2, on file with OCYFA.
- DCF Data System “[Case Types](#),” SSMIS Manual excerpt.

Accessibility Requests

To receive this information in an alternative format or for other accessibility requests, please contact:

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