

Green Mountain Youth Center

House Human Services + Senate Health & Welfare Committees

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Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate

The Committees' Ask:

1. Provide an update on the Green Mountain Youth Center (GMYC) facility.
2. Provide research on separating 18-year-olds from younger kids in GMYC.
3. What does research demonstrate as appropriate programming for kids?

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)

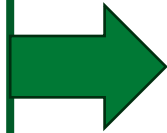
OCYFA & DCF's Common Ground

- We want all children to be safe & thriving.
- We want children to have their constellation of individualized needs met.
- We want Vermont children to return from out-of-state placements.
- We want less placements in detention facilities.

What are Vermont Youth and Parents Saying about Facilities?

2026 Youth Empowerment Summit Report

Youth Development Program
(YDP)



- Youth in residentials don't get enough enrichment, exercise, or opportunities to be outside.
- Youth in residential programming miss out on activities, meetings, and visits because of low staffing and a lack of transportation. Low staffing leads to more low staffing.
- Youth residing in residential facilities feel very isolated.

“She’s been in stabilization programs for a year and she’s not stabilized.”

– Caller to OCYFA - parent of a teen in custody under CHINS C and delinquency

According to DCF Regulation, GMYC is Detention.

Residential Treatment Program (RTP) Regulation definition:

Secure Program:

Is a building secure Residential Treatment Program which employs locked or inoperable doors and windows to prevent children/youth from leaving the building i.e. a detention program or hospital.

The designation of this facility matters:

- Locks on the doors, windows, exits, matter because they directly impact a child's civil rights.
- Will youth in the “treatment” side be allowed into the community?
- GMYC will be operated by 100% General Fund Dollars, as it is ineligible for Medicaid and IV-E funding.

GMYC will be the Most Restrictive Juvenile Setting in Vermont

- In 2016, the Department of Justice wrote directly to DCF, “Our concern is heightened further because those children who are placed at Woodside can be detained there for **significant periods** of time even when DCF staff agrees that a **less secure setting** would be appropriate if one were available.”
- The following year, DCF committed to “reduce the state’s overall use of residential facilities for youth” and to “ensure youth are in the least-restrictive settings possible.”
- Vermont must invest in step-down and preventive placements **concurrently, and with at-minimum *equal* investment** even while it builds most restrictive settings.

Serving 18+ at GMYC

- “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.”

Serving 18+ at GMYC

- Brattleboro Retreat's PRTF is designed to hold engaged patients up to age 21 (per EPSDT).
- Other states' youth justice facilities hold residents up to the age of 25.
- Add contracting requirements and licensing regulations that reflect safety, programmatic, and milieu considerations to support 18-year-olds at GMYC.

Research Findings on Youth Justice

Three decades of youth justice reform demonstrate that strategies built on the following pillars work:

- prioritizing diversion and rehabilitation;
- providing accountability *in tandem with* resources and opportunities;
- connecting young people with caring adults; and
- restoring ties to family and community, not severing them.

Remember the Research: Incarceration isn't a complement to the strategies that work. It's a distraction from best-practices and can actively undermine a young person's progress towards desistance.

Educational Programming

EDUCATION

RTP Education Regulation

609 A Residential Treatment Program shall ensure that every child/youth is provided an appropriate educational program in accordance with state law and approved by the Vermont Department of Education.

- Students in special education often stay in school until their 22nd birthday.
- Best practice is young people attending a local, public high school. Other residential programs achieve this.
- With a moratorium on Independent Schools in Vermont, what will education look like in GMYC?

Educational Programming

What are the educational outcomes of the youth who have been to Red Clover?

- How many credits have they earned?
- Can they read and at what level?

Special education (IEP) and civil rights law (504) convey **significant rights to children with disabilities**

- Tutoring programs will be insufficient.
- Consult Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) starting now.

Red Clover Cohort
Data:

**82.4% of young
people have an IEP
and/or 504 Plan**

**17.6% have standard
education plan**

Therapeutic Programming

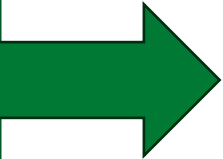
Below are examples of highly-rated modalities for youth with justice involvement::

- **Multisystemic Therapy (MST):** 12 – 17-year-olds, youth involved with the juvenile justice system and their parents/caregivers
- **Functional Family Therapy (FFT):** 11 – 18-year-olds with very serious conduct disorder, violent acting-out, and substance misuse
- **Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR):** 2 – 17-year-olds who have experienced trauma; posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), posttraumatic stress, phobias, and other mental health disorders

Regulation & Accountability

2026 Youth Empowerment Summit Report

Youth Development Program
(YDP)



Residential programs lack oversight & accountability.

- Youth are not kept safe. They are treated poorly. Youth are abused—emotionally, psychologically, and physically.
- Youth feel “gaslit” about their experiences.
- Youth have limited access to their caseworkers. Access is often determined by their behavior.
- Youth feel misled about the amenities in residential programs.
- Youth feel unable to advocate for being placed in a lower level of care.

Regulation & Accountability

- RTP Regulation rewrite is required with Act 136 of 2026.
- Changes to restraint and seclusion practices (including strip searches) goes into effect **January 1, 2027.**
- Purposeful changes to regulation can impact building design.

EXEMPTIONS AND ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS FOR SECURE FACILITIES

Secure Facilities shall be exempt from the following regulations.

- 508 A Residential Treatment Program shall accept and serve only those children/youth whose needs can be met by the services provided by the program.
- 622 A Residential Treatment Program shall ensure that children/youth have his/her own adequate, clean, and appropriate clothing.
- 648 A Residential Treatment Program shall prohibit all cruel, severe, unusual or unnecessary practices including, but not limited to:
- Strip searches;
 - Mechanical restraint.
 - Locked buildings, rooms, recreation areas.

42

Data-Driven Decision-Making

- Evaluate FS-167 "DCF Recommendation for Court-Ordered Secure Placement" content and outcomes. Report on number of Administrative Placements and moves within secure placements.
- Analyze placement histories of the number of 18-year-olds needing residential placement since 2020.
- Considering PRTF and GMYC are distinct levels of care, analyze the out-of-state children in PRTFs and how the length of stay aligns with Vermont's PRTF anticipated length of stay.
- Use Red Clover analyses to Inform GMYC, like educational outcomes and PREA audits.
- Accurate data is crucial for building upstream, responsive systems and supports.

Summary of Recommendations

- Vermont must invest in step-down and preventive placements concurrently.
- Rewrite Residential Treatment Program regulations following Act 136 of 2026 restraint and seclusion changes, including the removal of exemptions for secure facilities.
 - Consider removing licensing and regulatory authority of secure facilities from DCF.
- Add greater protections for children in secure placements.
- Add contracting requirements and licensing regulations that reflect safety, programmatic, and milieu considerations to support 18yo at GMYC.
- GMYC residents should attend the local public schools or an on-site, approved independent school must be in full compliance with special education programming.

Sources

- YDP Youth Empowerment Summit Report
- [What Juvenile Justice Data Reveal — And What the Numbers Can't Tell Us - The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)
- [RTP-Regs.pdf](#)
- [Adapting Practices in the Justice System for Emerging Adults - The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)
- [Benefit-Cost Analysis of “Raise the Age” in Washington State: Exploring Extension of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction to 18-20-Year-Olds](#)
- [Students Suspended Out of School in Ninth Grade Face Greater Risk of Juvenile Justice Involvement - The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

Sources

- [23-146-F-GCR-Retreat-CY24.pdf](#)
- [Brattleboro Retreat FY26 Budget Review](#)
- [H-0931 As Passed by Both House and Senate Unofficial.pdf](#)
- [The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare](#)
- [DCF Collaboration with US Department of Justice Leads to Better Outcomes for Youth - Feb 2017.pdf](#)

Accessibility Requests

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

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