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Agency of Human Services

To: The House Committee on Human Services and The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

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Therapeutic Consideration for the Green Mountain Youth Center (GMYC)

The design of Green Mountain Youth Center reflects many intentional choices made with the experience of young people, families, and staff in mind. Throughout the project, the team considered how the physical environment could support safety while also promoting dignity, choice, connection, and a sense of normalcy. These considerations came out of the best thinking available to the team, including discussions with experts across the country, individuals with personal lived experience, and invested stakeholders- including the previous Facility Planning Stakeholders Working group.

- The decision to use buildings as natural boundaries reflects an effort to create a safer environment without relying solely on traditional fencing. The approach allows security needs to be thoughtfully integrated into the overall setting rather than becoming the defining feature of the campus.
- The team intentionally chose not to center the facility around a single control “bubble.” Instead, staff keys and key cards support movement throughout the center. This approach allows security and supervision to remain present while supporting a more distributed, residential feel.
- The decision to separate education, recreation, and administration—including medical and dining spaces—was made with normalization in mind.
 - Youth can leave their residential setting and walk to school, creating a daily rhythm that feels more familiar and more like a typical school experience.
 - Walking to the gym for recreation or the cafeteria for meals creates additional opportunities to move through the outdoors and experience a change of setting throughout the day.
- Windows were intentionally incorporated to bring natural light and views of nature into everyday spaces.
 - High windows in the day rooms and gym provide natural daylight while maintaining appropriate privacy.
 - Bedroom windows offer views of the surrounding natural environment, giving residents a visual connection to the outdoors.



- Adjustable shades and operable air vents provide residents with opportunities to have some control over their personal environment—small choices that can contribute to comfort and a sense of ownership.
- Exterior materials and landscaping were selected to make the campus feel more welcoming and familiar.
 - Wood paneling, siding, and gabled roof structures were chosen to create a character more reminiscent of a residential neighborhood than a traditional institutional setting.
 - Landscaping elements, including grasses, flowers, and strategically placed boulders, serve practical purposes while also softening the edges of the buildings and creating a more natural setting.
- The raised garden beds near the education building reflect a choice to create opportunities for hands-on learning and therapeutic connection with nature. They can support educational activities, horticulture, responsibility, and time spent outdoors.
- Life skills and makers classrooms recognize that learning extends beyond traditional academics. These spaces were included to give youth opportunities to develop practical, creative, and vocational skills that can contribute to independence and life beyond the center.
- Nursing and clinical spaces were intentionally separated from the residential units. This creates a clearer distinction between living and treatment environments while keeping needed services accessible.
- The full outdoor court, with bleachers and benches, was designed to support movement, recreation, social connection, and opportunities to simply spend time outside.
 - Color and thoughtful fencing choices help soften the visual impact of necessary security measures and allow the recreational environment to feel more inviting.
- A shade structure in the courtyard creates another flexible outdoor space where youth and staff can meet, gather, talk, or spend time outside comfortably.
- Consult rooms with windows are intentionally distributed throughout the education, recreation, administration, and residential areas.
 - Rather than requiring every conversation to happen in a formal clinical setting, these spaces provide accessible options for private conversations, individual support, or taking a break from a larger group.
 - Views toward the courtyard and access to natural light help make these spaces feel more comfortable and connected to the broader environment.
- The patio provides an opportunity to bring meals, visits, and social connection outdoors when circumstances allow.
- A separate sheriff entrance and garage were incorporated with resident privacy in mind. This approach allows secure arrival and departure while avoiding the need for a highly institutional “sally port” experience for residents.
- A temporary intake bed was included as a way to make the transition into the center gentler, particularly for late-night admissions. It provides a quieter place for a new resident to settle in, helping minimize disruption to the existing milieu while giving the young person time to feel safe and oriented.
- Automatic night lighting in resident rooms was selected with both safety and dignity in mind. The lighting allows staff to complete routine nighttime checks without needing to shine a flashlight directly into a young person’s space.
- Dividable common spaces provide flexibility to respond to the individual needs of youth in the stabilization program. Staff can create smaller groups based on age, gender, developmental needs, or treatment considerations rather than requiring everyone to share the same space or experience.

- The flexible kitchen design creates opportunities for youth to participate in meal preparation and service. This gives young people a chance to practice everyday skills, contribute to the community, and experience appropriate independence and responsibility.
- Exterior access to the indoor gymnasium was intentionally incorporated to support planned community engagement activities. The design creates opportunities to connect with people and activities beyond the residential setting while maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Durable, damage-resistant interior materials were chosen to balance safety, longevity, and the desire for a more welcoming environment. Rather than defaulting to traditional cement and cinder block construction, the project incorporates materials that can withstand the demands of the setting while creating a less institutional feel.
 - Anti-ligature hardware is incorporated throughout as an important safety consideration, while other design choices work to ensure that safety measures do not unnecessarily define the environment.

Taken together, these decisions reflect a belief that safety and security do not have to come at the expense of dignity, normalcy, choice, or connection. The environment was shaped through many individual decisions about what young people might see, hear, experience, and feel as they move through the center each day.