Governor Hassan's Commission on At-Risk Adolescent Youth

August 25, 2015
Governor Maggie Hassan
State House
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Governor Hassan,

The Continuing Resolution has afforded us an opportunity to revisit the appropriations and reductions proposed in House Bill (HB) 2. Reductions proposed to the Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC) budget are substantial (1.7 million in FY2016 and 3.5 million in FY2017), and would have significant impacts on the youth served at the Center. Without a plan to assist in these reductions, this Commission understands that drastic cuts would be made to direct service staff. The limitations in available time to implement these reductions would necessitate both severe enough reductions to staffing resources to leave youth at risk and insufficient time for NH providers to respond to the resulting changes.

A more thoughtful approach is needed. We believe the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) requires a reasonable amount of time to develop a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to committed and detained youth.

This Commission's role is to assist DHHS in strategic planning for at risk youth and the SYSC. We stand ready and willing to continue that work. Executive Order 2014-08 charges this body, made up of a bipartisan group of legislators, subject matter experts, and advocates for at risk youth, with advising and offering input on budgetary matters impacting the SYSC, including ways to reduce costs at the Center. Although it is clear that changes are needed, the time needed for planning and execution of any significant changes to the programming at SYSC, and federal funding participation for same, is such that savings of more than $5m this biennium is unrealistic. If savings can be realized, the amounts would likely be significantly lower. Forcing cuts in the amount in House Bill (HB) 2 will jeopardize the safety, well-being, and future prospects of the children receiving services at SYSC.

In this vein, we recommend that no reductions be made to the Sununu Youth Services Center in this biennium. Lastly, we request that this Commission be charged with working with DHHS on a comprehensive plan that proposes a continuum of services for the NH juvenile justice population, including youth determined to be at risk for entering the system and those transitioning out of the system, which will reduce costs long term.

Please feel free to contact me for further information. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey C. Souther, Chair
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