

SEA / SEIU LOCAL 1984

# FACT SHEET



207 N. Main Street, Concord, NH 03246

## Sununu Youth Services Center (SYSC)

SYSC provides vital services for the most serious juvenile offenders of NH and should not be closed. The youth that are detained or committed at SYSC require enrichment, structure, safety, education, treatment, and recreation. We need to be investing in them, not cutting services to this program/facility. If this facility is closed, youth will suffer, communities will suffer, and crimes such as human trafficking will continue to rise.

*"In New Hampshire, we do not "incarcerate" youth in a "correctional" facility. We detain or commit youth to a youth services center". James Plumer, New Hampshire Juvenile Probation and Parole Officer.*

The issue of the closure of The Sununu Center will come up in the Senate Finance Committee on May 4, 2021 (HB1 and HB2)

- The closing of the Sununu Center should be considered a stand-alone bill.
- This decision is being made too quickly, too soon.
- There should be an opportunity to study the process, find ways to mitigate damage, and understand unintended consequences such as the items listed below.

### 1. Effects on the NH Community and violent youth offenders:

- It is illegal to keep youth in adult prison facilities.
  - Youth scheduled to go to adult prisons are too dangerous and would not be accepted at any other facilities in New Hampshire.
  - Laws are strict on sentencing but loose on programming and treatment. Laws actually prevent effective treatment as no effective treatment can be conducted in the 3 to 6-month sentences currently considered appropriate.
- There has been a spike in violent crimes by youth over the last five years in New Hampshire. This spike includes murder, rape, child molestations (teenagers who offend younger children), and gun crimes. Certain kinds of sexual crimes also lead to rape and murder.
  - As a direct result of the above, the recidivism rate is currently in the high 90's percentage.

### 2. What happens to youth:

- There is a waitlist for placements in many out-of-state secure facilities.
- There are no other secure facilities in New Hampshire.
- There are no drug treatment programs for court-ordered kids. SYSC is currently the only option to protect them from OD and death.
- The same is true for youth who run away, endangering themselves; they get trafficked and involved with prostitution. All other residential programs are not secure; youth can and do run.
- Private placements have the right to refuse a youth admission. SYSC doesn't.

- Group homes and other options for youth in New Hampshire are not sufficient for these kids.
- There has been a dramatic increase in the use of LSD, Pills, Heroin, Meth, and Fentanyl by NH youth; what happens when they need help?
- Currently, there are no facilities available in New Hampshire for youth with gun/murder/rape charges other than SYSC.

### **3. Cost-Effectiveness:**

- Transportation to out-of-state facilities is \$10,000 for driving and \$4,000 for flights.
- Building a smaller facility or utilizing the current facility for Medicare reimbursable programs should be considered.
- There is no talk about what will happen to the facility and the property in the future.
- New Hampshire will have to pay the Federal Gov. \$13.4M to shut the facility based on the agreement for funding from the Federal Govt.
- Exploring the option for a new facility would cost millions:
  - Without a proper facility to house and treat the most dangerous youth offenders, the public is exposed to great harm.
  - Any facility (if a new one is constructed) must have 24-hour medical care, an accredited education program, recreational programming, and the ability to feed the residents and staff.
  - Any new facility needs to have 30 beds with an area for quarantine. The residential census has been as high as 22 in the past year, and no one knows what the future may hold.

### **4. Factors regarding Employment:**

- Under the current version of the bill, SYSC will close on 6/30/22.
  - There will be a significant loss of qualified, committed, and capable staff.
  - Losing staff as they seek other appropriate employment will create a crisis for which the state is not prepared.
  - Currently, hundreds of hours of overtime are worked each month. This demonstrates that the system is already beyond strained.
  - The plan to retrain staff for other positions in HHS is short-sighted and assumes no more need for staffing in a secure facility for youth.

### **5. Where and what are the options or the solutions?**

- What happens to youth if there is no facility?
- What happens to the facility if we do not use it for what it was intended?
- Where is the concern for families, victims, and the general public?
- Where is the plan for these youth following the proposed closure?
- Why won't House Leadership discuss options for keeping the facility open?

### **6. Support**

- State Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice (SAG), Faith-Based organizations, Mayors, Police Chiefs, County Commissioners, Police Unions need to be a part of the discussion.
- NH State Legislature

## **INTERNAL USE AND REFERENCES ONLY**

**“Honestly, I think language is a big part of this. People hear secure and think prison. We hear secure and think safe. I don’t know how to fix that.” New Hampshire Juvenile Probation and Parole Officer.**

**“The Senate is going to fix it” - Lori Shibinette, Commissioner, DHHS.**

**References/supporting documents:** The study conducted by Alvarez and Marsal Public Sector Services, LLC on contract with New Hampshire recommended: Quoted below.

- SYSC System of Care and Long Term Plan - Continue to build out the Systems of care for DCYF to inform a feasible timeline and long-term plan for right-sizing the SYSC facility.
- Establish concurrent uses for SYSC - Identify concurrent uses for the SYSC facility to offset costs.
- HB517, enacted in June 2017, limited the types of youth that could enter SYSC and shortened the timeline youth spent at SYSC.
- SB592 enacted in June 2018 waives reimbursement for voluntary services under the child protection act, establishes a home visiting services initiative, expands certain childcare services, and establishes a committee to study family drug court models.
- Among the most prominent reasons for the decreased census at SYSC is the decline in using secure facilities to incarcerate juvenile offenders, stemming from the changes to sentencing and the implementation of sentence review enacted by New Hampshire in HB517.
- While admissions of committed juveniles at SYSC have decreased by 56 percent between FY17 and FY19, recidivism rates increased by 31.5 percent during the same period. In FY19, the recidivism rate for SYSC was 81.5 percent, indicating gaps in the current Systems of Care. Moreover, the average utilization of SYSC in FY20 was 12 percent, with an average daily population of 16.9 individuals. Lastly, recidivism rates have increased since the implementation of HB517.
- Closing SYSC would require NH to build/procure a new correctional facility.
- SYSC currently does not have any other in-state correctional facility placement options.

### **Examples of current offenses of Juveniles now in secure detention at SYSC**

If these youth do not have a secure facility, the community at large will not be safe. Youth, in general, will not be safe.

- Murder X5
- Two counts of Second Degree Assault involving a firearm (shot someone twice)
- Attempted Murder involving a firearm (shot someone 6-7 times)
- Stabbings
- Armed Robbery involving a firearm
- Second Degree Assault X2
- Possession of a firearm
- Arson
  
- Felony Drug charges X2
  
- Second Degree Felony Assault
- Aggravated Felonious Sexual Assault (AFSA) X2
- Felony Burglary
  
- Arson
  
- Sexual contact under age 13 X 2
- Robbery with a weapon (gun/knife) X 5
- Burglary with a weapon (gun/knife) X 3
- First-degree assault
- Second-degree assault X 6

Youth can plea bargain their charges. So, a felonious assault could be plea-bargained down to simple assault. The result is that their stay at SYSC will be so short that effective programming is longer than their required stay at SYSC. Very dangerous youth are then released into the general population with only probation officers to answer to.