



The State Employees' Association Of New Hampshire, Inc.

Service Employees International Union, Local 1984, CTW, CLC

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DHHS EMPLOYEES OF SYSC AND JUVENILE JUSTICE SERVICES ISSUE STATEMENT

Concord, NH, October 18, 2022 – On behalf of the Department of Health and Human Service employees currently working at the Sununu Youth Services Center, the State Employees' Association, SEIU Local 1984 (SEA), is issuing the following statement today regarding the ongoing safety issues at this facility.

"We share the determination of our local community to keep SYSC a safe and welcoming place for everyone. We work hard to create an environment that fosters inclusion and belonging and to educate our internal and external communities about the safety issues, respect, rights and responsibilities, and the dignity of all individuals. Creating an environment that protects all of our safety and promotes health and well-being should always be a top priority.

However, the events of the last few months are cause for concern. SYSC and Juvenile Justice in NH are in crisis with no solution in sight. SYSC has less than 1/2 the staff needed to keep employees and the youth within the facility safe. As a result, we are losing staff - long-serving, caring, and skilled in working with the state's most volatile youth. The incidents of assaults on staff are skyrocketing. Staff injuries are now commonplace. In the past three months, local and state police as well as emergency medical services, have been called to the facility more than ten times to help address unsafe, assaultive, and out-of-control residents. This is unprecedented.... and our agencies are broken.

This is why we are reaching out today. While we are grateful our injured co-workers are still with us, some have suffered severe injuries, and the safety of the employees and the children we are entrusted to care for is at risk. Regardless of the severity of the physical injuries, events like these are life-changing and reverberate in the lives of those most immediately affected and the entire community. Therefore, we have reached out to our union for help in providing support and resources following this physically and emotionally trying time.

As state employees working at SYSC, we are committed to fostering a safe and secure environment for all. We have tried working with those involved and feel that our voices have not been heard and our director is not listening. We are understaffed, overworked, and emotionally drained. On Tuesday, October 11, we were issued an overtime mandate for all Juvenile Probation and Parole Officers (JPPOs) and Juvenile Probation and Parole Supervisors (JPPSs) serving at the center. However, that will not help our situation but instead worsen it. We need an immediate response to address the lack of help, ensuring these incidents no longer occur.

No one should fear for their safety as they go about their daily lives. Violence is a public health crisis, and we can no longer stay silent. We are committed to working on solutions – working collectively to make our working environment and the community a safer place for everyone."

Rich Gulla, President of the SEA, states, "the mission statement of SYSC is this: 'To work together as a team to provide safety, support, and treatment to the youth in our care to build a better life.' Unfortunately, when there is no response, there is no working together. The State Employees' Association (SEA) is here to support all our members, and we are shocked to learn that these incidents are still occurring and we condemn the lack of assistance to help all those involved.

Moving forward, we hope to play a key role in assisting the DHHS employees with developing and fostering the plans and the solutions they need to move forward in meaningful roles as engaged state employees without the fear of violence or unsafe working conditions."

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