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New Hampshire Office of the Child Advocate Releases Issue Brief, Concerns for Out-of-State Residential Facility: Bledsoe Youth Academy

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) has highlighted concerns for the use of residential care since it's inception. This is fueled by research which indicates that children are more likely to have positive outcomes when they remain in their communities and connected with their families. New Hampshire's system of care continues to make reforms toward compliance with the federal Families First Prevention Services Act of 2018 by increasing community-based services, and prioritizing kin when placement is necessary. Residential placements are intended as a last resort. If an appropriate placement cannot be located within the State of New Hampshire, the placing agency within the Department of Health and Human Services will seek residential placement out of state. Not only does this isolate children from their families and community supports, but it also leaves them vulnerable without the proper oversight by our state agencies.

Visits to residential facilities, both in and out of state, is a regular practice at the OCA. It is within the office's purview to ensure children in out-of-home placements are receiving the appropriate level of care and their best interests are being met. For this reason, The Child Advocate and Assistant Child Advocate visited Bledsoe Youth Academy in Gallatin, Tennessee in July 2023.

"My office felt the need to highlight concerns observed and voiced during a visit to an out-of-state residential facility in which New Hampshire kids are placed." Sanchez stated. "When young people are far from home, they are at their most vulnerable. It is incumbent on the system responsible for their well-being to ensure they are receiving the therapeutic care they need to return to their communities as soon as possible. If placement facilities cannot deliver the service provision our state agencies have entrusted them to provide, then our children should not remain in those settings."

The issue briefing details firsthand observations, disclosures from the kids in placement, efforts made to date to return the children to New Hampshire, and recommendations to improve quality of care for all children in residential placements.

Pursuant to RSA 21-V, the Office of the Child Advocate provides independent oversight of all children's services provided or arranged for by the State to assure that the best interests of children are being protected.

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