



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Great Valley Youth Residential Center will remain open

CATHARINE YOUNG April 9, 2008

The Great Valley Youth Residential Center will remain open as a non-secure facility for at least the coming year while a study is completed to compare the effectiveness of residential versus community-based treatment for juveniles, announced Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C-Olean).

The plan was approved in the final budget passed by the state Senate and Assembly. Great Valley had been slated to close under former Governor Spitzer's budget proposal that was released January 23. Subsequently, the Cattaraugus County Legislature passed a resolution calling for the Center to be converted from a non-secure to limited secure facility. Several public forums garnered support for and against the conversion, Sen. Young said.

"After carefully reviewing data supplied by the state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and listening to the community, we decided the best solution is to keep the Center the way it is for now. The state has invested millions of dollars in capital upgrades to the site, and several Western New York youth housed in other facilities around the state could be here at Great Valley," Sen. Young said.

"OCFS has been engineering a major upheaval of the juvenile justice system state-wide without any evidence their new system is going to work. Before we make any more changes,

we need answers. The responsible way to go is to conduct a study by an unbiased, nationally-recognized and qualified firm to compare the recidivism rates of OCFS' residential facilities such as Great Valley versus community-based programs. We need to understand the facts about these treatments specifically in New York State. I insisted this study be included in the final state budget, and it will be conducted over three years with an interim report due in January 2009," Sen. Young said.

Sen. Young led the charge to keep Great Valley open during budget negotiations as a member of the Human Services Conference Committee.

Assemblyman Joseph Giglio (R,I,C - Gowanda) also weighed in about saving the facility.

"I am pleased that the Great Valley Residential Center will remain in operation as a non-secure facility. Further, the commissioning of a study on all aspects of the juvenile justice system in New York State is the right choice for all parties, and most importantly, the youth that are placed within the system. It is important that the Western New York region be home to this facility so that our youth can remain near their families and loved ones. This is a positive step toward ensuring the safety of the staff, the youth and the community," he said.

The final plan is acceptable to local officials, according to Great Valley Supervisor Dan Brown.

"The town is behind running the facility exactly the way it is now and doing it right. It keeps money and jobs in our area. We have had a great relationship over the years and the kids have helped with volunteer projects," Mr. Brown said.

Sen. Young said the current plan meets the community's needs until more information is gathered.

"Once the study is completed, and if an alternative use is recommended, I will convene a task force made up of community stakeholders. We will cross that bridge if and when we come to it," she said.