



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

## Senator Murphy Applauds Implementation of OCFS Corrective Action Plan for Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Facility

TERRENCE MURPHY May 16, 2017

| ISSUE: **YOUTH, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND AT-RISK YOUTH**

Re: Closure of Intake at JBFCS Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Campus

Dear Mr. Rodriguez: *Terrence*

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), is charged with providing oversight, monitoring, and technical assistance to voluntary authorized agencies responsible for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in their care. This is achieved through comprehensive voluntary agency reviews (VARs), as well as announced and unannounced site visits.

OCFS's monitoring activities at Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCs) have revealed a pattern of serious issues directly impacting the safety of children in JBFCs's residential program at the Hawthorne Cedar Knolls campus and in the Mt. Pleasant community. These issues reflect a lack of sustainable change despite the efforts and corrective actions implemented June – December 2016, when OCFS worked closely with JBFCs leadership to address critical incidents on the campus and youth leaving without consent. While JBFCs had demonstrated notable progress when the Corrective Action Plan was closed, recent events reveal a decline in the agency's progress. The identified critical incidents include the following:

1. There is a historical pattern of youth leaving the campus without authorization, most recently resulting in two serious incidents that placed the residents and community at risk. The events occurred on April 18, 2017 and May 7, 2017 respectively.
  - a. The April 18, 2017 incident involved four girls, all under the age of 16, who left the campus, followed by staff. They boarded a Metro North commuter train without tickets, and were directed, by the conductor, to leave the train at the next stop. The girls went to a Chinese restaurant and ordered food, believing that they had a credit card to pay. The credit card did not "work". As the

Albany, NY - The Hawthorne Cedar Knolls residential facility, which is managed by the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services (JBFCs), must now adhere to a demanding corrective action plan as a result of a string of violent episodes in the surrounding community. In a letter to the JBFCs' Deputy Executive Vice President, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) detailed a series of provisions the residential facility must now

follow. Most of the directives are geared towards residents leaving the campus without authorization and increasing security around the facility's perimeter.

New York State Senator Terrence Murphy said, "Once again Commissioner Poole and her office are putting forward common sense policies to address the concerns we continue to hear from the Mt. Pleasant community. We have been working diligently on this issue together for nearly a year, making strong progress, but the recent episodes have forced OCFS to implement an escalated corrective action plan that focuses on the lax security and allowing residents to walk off the campus at will."

In addition to the closure of intake at the residential facility, citing a "historical pattern of youth leaving the campus without authorization," OCFS is also requiring the following actions:

A full assessment of the residents on the Hawthorne Cedar Knolls campus to determine which of those youths pose serious risk to other residents and the community;

Update the Individualized Crisis Management Plans of those residents to include appropriate interventions to protect the safety of the youth, other residents and the community;

Develop a strategic action plan to address the pattern of youth leaving the campus without authorization and demonstrate sustainable reduction in the volume;

Assess the perimeter of the campus and address areas where youth are leaving the campus;

Seek consultation and technical assistance to strengthen the program for girls who are at high risk for leaving without authorization and develop a program model for OCFS review.

Furthermore, all "Critical Incidents" impacting the health, safety and well-being of youth at the Hawthorne Cedar Knolls campus and the Mt. Pleasant community must be reported to OCFS within 24 hours.

Earlier today Senator Murphy hosted a meeting in Albany where all of the regulatory agencies who oversee the JBFCS Hawthorne Cedar Knolls campus discussed the need for

greater coordination and communication. Consequently, a task force led by OCFS is expected to be formed to examine the existing regulations and protocols that are in place at each agency and to devise a blueprint to address the systematic concerns that have been voiced by Senator Murphy, Mt. Pleasant Supervisor Carl Fulgenzi and the Mt. Pleasant community.

Supervisor Fulgenzi said, "Today was a crucial and positive step for a permanent solution regarding the issues our community is facing. I want to thank Commissioner Poole for her diligent support and continued work. There is clearly more that must be done but our focus remains on the safety of the students, residents and members of our community."