

MEMO

To: Facilities Stakeholder Group
From: Karen Vastine, Chair of the Council for Equitable Youth Justice
Re: Criteria for HESOC/Facilities Consultant
Date: April 15th, 2024

Background: The Council for Equitable Youth Justice is charged by the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act to support compliance monitoring with four core requirements intended to ensure the safety and equitable treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system. Those include separation of juveniles from adults inmates and the removal of juveniles from adult jails and lockups.

Vermont was out of compliance with the jail removal core requirement in FFY2021 due to five 18-year-olds being placed in adult facilities without sight and sound separation after the Raise the Age law went into effect in July 2020. This means that a significant portion of the grant funds CEYJ received has to be used towards corrective action in the system.

While the CEYJ remains committed to supporting a right-sized system of care that relies more on home-like, family-center care for youth; without a facility or program that can serve youth who require short-term hardware secure settings, Vermont will likely continue to violate the adult jail removal and/or sight and sound separation core requirements.

The facilities stakeholder group has expressed a keen interest in hearing from experts in High End System of Care to support its work. This aligns well with the goals of CEYJ and as such CEYJ has offered to pursue permission from the DOJ to utilize some of its grant dollars to hire a consultant to support the work of this group.

Criteria for Consultant:

There are several criteria that will be key for the groups to agree on so that a Request for Proposals can be drafted and issued as soon as is feasible.

We are clear on some overarching themes:

- We want the consultant to support and guide us in ensuring that racial equity is baked into all aspects of the system.
- And, we want to be guided by those with lived experience (or their families). Both of these and more will be included in the deliverables sought in the RFP.
- There will be more themes developed.

What we need now:

For the stakeholder group, starting with criteria we can agree to will be an important step in shaping the RFP. Please consider these so that we can discuss them together at Monday's meeting.

We seek a consultant/consultant group that has the following experience and knowledge:

1. Utilizing evidence-based, developmentally appropriate approaches that support youth rehabilitation, treatment and ultimately their successful return to their communities as quickly as possible. (add language that emphasizes bias for discharge)
 - a. Formal step-down options.
 - b. Seamless treatment modalities in/across system.
 - c. Escalating criteria for maintaining youth in the environment (AKA - it should be harder to keep kids in highest levels of care).
2. Experience outside of Vermont
3. Youth's due process rights regarding placement;
4. Right-sizing the system by using data to determine the number of beds and level of supervision and treatment;
5. Ensuring the system gives young people the best opportunity to remain engaged with their families and support system; and
6. Ethnic & Racial Disparities – Both regarding placement and discharge planning – treatment and culture of program (overarching contextual point) Goal of development is that we reduce racial disparities at every stage of the game.
7. Setting up clear, sustainable system oversight, regulation and accountability.