



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony
Public Health Committee
March 6, 2020



To: Sen. Mary Daugherty Abrams, Chair
Rep. Jonathan Steinberg, Chair
Sen. Heather Somers, Ranking Member
Rep. William Petit, Ranking Member
Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee

From: Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner
Department of Children and Families

Re: Raised HB 5020, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
Regarding Public Health

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) **supports sections 8 through 10** of Raised HB 5020, which will allow for the Department of Public Health (DPH) to license the north and south campuses of the Albert J. Solnit Children's Center (Solnit Center).

The Solnit Center is a state-administered psychiatric facility for children located on two campuses. Solnit South, located in Middletown, consists of four coed psychiatric hospital units and three female adolescent psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) cottages. Solnit North, located in East Windsor, is a PRTF for adolescent males. Pursuant to C.G.S. section 19a-490, the Solnit Center is statutorily exempt from state licensing requirements. However, the facility is certified through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and accredited through The Joint Commission. Pursuant to CMS requirements, the south and north campuses are subject to mandatory inspections once every five years, and each time there is an investigation of a serious occurrence within the facility. These inspections are undertaken by DPH under a contract with the Department of Social Services (DSS).

After the tragic suicide of a pregnant youth in 2018, DPH, in partnership with DSS and DCF, investigated safety and care issues at the Solnit South PRTF, and issued a directed Plan of Correction as a condition of the facility's continued participation in the federal Medicaid program. Pursuant to federal regulations regarding the remediation of concerns, the Plan of Correction included a requirement that DCF retain a full-time consulting team to help monitor and implement necessary improvements. As a result, Beacon Health Options, an expert in the area of quality management, was engaged to develop a Quality Management Program Outline intended to build and sustain high quality clinical care and services. Solnit staff and administrators worked with DPH inspectors, Barrins & Associates—an independent monitoring consultant—and Beacon Health Options to successfully comply with the DPH/DSS directives. The Solnit South PRTF

was subsequently discharged from further intensive monitoring by DPH once the Plan of Correction was fully implemented.

Last year, the General Assembly passed Special Act 19-16, An Act Concerning the Licensure of the Albert J. Solnit Children's Center, which directed the Commissioner of Children and Families to submit a report recommending a process for DPH to license the Solnit Center. The act required DCF to work with the Commissioners of DPH and DSS and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) in the drafting of the report. To implement this requirement, a Working Group was organized in August 2019, comprised of representatives from DCF, DPH, DSS, OCA, the Solnit Center campuses, Beacon Health Options, and two privately-operated adolescent psychiatric treatment facilities. The Working Group met on a bi-weekly basis through November 2019 in order to draft the report, which was submitted to the Committee on Children earlier this year. For further reference, please see [Special Act 19-16 Solnit Licensing Report](#).

The Governor's proposal adopts the Working Group's recommendations to repeal the licensure exemption for the Solnit Center and for DPH to promulgate regulations on licensing the PRTFs at both the north and south campuses. Further, the Governor's midterm FY 2021 budget adjustments provide funding to support 6 additional nurses and 1 additional clinician to be employed at Solnit North. Consistent with the Working Group's findings, these positions are needed for Solnit North to meet the anticipated licensure standards for staffing.

The Department believes that the creation of an external licensing framework will provide a critical level of oversight and transparency and help ensure the Solnit Center's sustained adherence to established standards for quality care and treatment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.