

**LR 377 Hearing
YRTC Geneva
August 24, 2018**

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Good Afternoon, Senator Riepe, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Mark LaBouchardiere (M-A-R-K L-A-B-O-U-C-H-A-R-D-I-E-R-E) and I am the Director of Facilities for the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here to testify in on LR 377, which provides for an interim study to review procedures and practices at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) Geneva with the intent to improve the safety and security of the youth housed at the facility, the staff who work there, and the neighbors who live nearby.

The safety of the youth in our care, our staff, and the surrounding community are of utmost importance. Assaultive behavior by our youth is a constant concern. Our staff are trained in Handle with Care, a behavioral management technique that emphasizes de-escalation skills. Our youth-on-youth assaults continue to be very low and we have seen a three-year decline in our assault numbers. In 2016 there were 18 assaults and in 2017 there were 17 assaults. Thus far in 2018, there have been only eight youth-on-youth assaults.

Unfortunately, since March of this year, we saw an upswing in youth-on-staff assaults. I would like to note that 80% of these assaults are level one, or there was no visible injury or pain, and 90% were level one or level two. Level two assaults are classified as injury or pain requiring first aid treatment only. We also have a significant amount of youth with mental health issues and those youth tend to have unpredictable behavior, such as assaulting staff. As soon as we saw this trend, our new staff received coaching and extra support in the living units by our administrative and supervisory staff members. There is an increased amount of support for these youth with our mental health staff. Both of the YRTC campuses are also working together on joint initiatives for staff safety and expect results from those efforts. We will continue to watch this data and youth behavior moving forward to provide the safest environment possible.

We are happy to report that we continue to have very few escapes from the YRTC-Geneva campus. To keep this number low, we have increased supervision outside of the buildings and also have staff who are periodically watching the facility perimeter for any suspicious activity. Previous year escape numbers were also relatively low. 2016 saw four escapes and 2017 saw 10. It should be noted that in one night in 2017, nine youth managed to escape our campus who were all apprehended within approximately 8 hours. This situation prompted the increased security measures as previously mentioned to prevent any other large scale escapes. So far this year, we have had one escape from campus and that youth was returned to the facility in a little over four hours.

In regards to the physical state of our facilities, the majority of the buildings were built in the mid-1900's with our oldest building erected in 1924 and our newest building, LaFlesche Cottage, built in 2001. We

currently have two of our living units open to house youth. Recent efforts with juvenile reform to ensure that only high-risk youth are present in our facility have drastically decreased our population to around 20-30 youth at any given time.

YRTC Geneva continues to increase its efforts to provide evidence-based programming for our youth and has recognized the following evidence-based programs.

- Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), a cognitive-behavioral program, currently implemented, that leads to enhanced moral reasoning, better decision making, and more appropriate behavior;
- Aggression Replacement Training (ART), a program aimed at helping youth to develop more appropriate anger management skills. We hope to have this program implemented within the next six months.
- Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach (A-CRA) a program the therapists utilize to treat adolescent substance abuse. This program includes both individual and family therapy sessions in order to support the youth through their recovery and is endorsed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The YRTC-Geneva also continues to offer the Mothers and Babies program. Coordinated by one of our case managers, this program is available to youth who are pregnant or have children. The program provides information and learning experiences centered on child care and development as well as pre-natal and post-natal care. A crucial component of the program is a regular visitation schedule for the parenting youth and their child so that they can bond and interact as well as gain support from staff for utilizing positive parenting skills.

We also are offering our youth more vocational opportunities and have seen three of our high school graduate youth through their certified nurse's aide program offered by Southeast Community College. We hope to continue these types of opportunities through our collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation and the Nebraska Department of Labor. With our youth who have not yet graduated from high school, representatives from Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Labor work with the youth on career exploration and post-secondary education enrollment.

We are grateful for the opportunity to highlight the changes we have made to our campus in terms of programming and security. Helping the youth we serve to live better lives and keeping our staff and communities safe will continue to be of the utmost importance to the Department.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.