

**LR 377 Hearing
YRTC Kearney
August 29, 2018**

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Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services**

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 YRTC Kearney 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. Over the past three years, YRTC Kearney has had its ups and downs with youth on youth assaults. For this year, YRTC Kearney averaged 14 youth on youth assaults per month. In terms of youth-on-staff assaults, we are seeing a distinct trend down from previous years. In 2016, the YRTC-Kearney experience 251 youth-on-staff assaults. This is a staggering number, and efforts were put in place to immediately improve the safety of the campus. In 2017, there were 145, close to half as many, youth on staff assaults. Thus far in 2018, there have been 97 youth on staff assaults, which is on track to having fewer than the previous year.

Of those 97 assaults in 2018:

- 45 resulted in no physical pain or injury to the staff;
- 30 injuries required basic first aid, 9 received on campus medical treatment by our nursing staff;
- and 13 required treatment off campus at a medical clinic or emergency room.

All of our employees who sought out outside medical treatment were treated for their injuries and then released from the medical facility that same day.

We continue to monitor the data trends in regards to aggressive behavior by our youth. We have increased security staff presence in the living units and continue to coach our staff in de-escalation techniques. Brief time-out periods are utilized in our Dickson Behavioral Stabilization Unit to help give youth space to gather their thoughts.

Restorative Justice Principles such, as mediation, are being implemented across campus to assist youth in mediating their differences with other youth or staff members. We have seen great success in the accountability youth are taking for their actions and their recognition of how their actions affect others. By implementing these principles and also utilizing de-escalation skills, we have experienced not only a drop in assaults, but also a reduction in confinement time for youth. Tracking of confinement hours began in July of 2016 and the YRTC-Kearney posted 86 hours average time per incident. That

number has dropped drastically in July to less than half, or 31.75, average hours of confinement per incident.

An area of concern for not only the YRTC Kearney, but also shared with us by the Kearney community as a whole, is the amount of escapes that occur from our campus. We are again, happy to report a very significant decline in the amount of successful escapes from our campus. In 2016, the YRTC Kearney saw 36 escapes from our campus. The following year, there were 17, less than half as many, escapes. We are happy to report that thus far in 2018, there have been 4 escapes from our campus, on track to decrease the number of escapes again by more than half from the previous year.

This success is due to strategic measures put in place to reduce opportunities for youth to escape. Measures include a constant perimeter patrol during waking hours and highly monitoring all youth movements by security staff members. As the committee may be aware, the DHHS business plan for fiscal year 2018/2019 has included a perimeter fence for the YRTC Kearney campus to even further decrease the number of escapes ensuring safety for the community as well as our youths.

In regards to the physical state of our facility, the majority of the buildings were built in the early to mid-1970's. Recent efforts with juvenile justice reform to ensure that only high risk youth are present in our facility have drastically decreased our population. The average daily count for fiscal year 2016/2017 was 97 youth.

YRTC Kearney 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).

YRTC Kearney continues its collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Labor and Vocational Rehabilitation to provide our youth with career exploration and preparation for post-secondary education. We hope to bolster these efforts and provide more vocational opportunities for our youth who are high school graduates. Currently, youth may elect to take a safety course through OHS, giving them more experience as they enter the workforce.

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.