

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

School Is Serving Its Purpose

There's no shortage of concern for what the future holds when it comes to providing safe and secure residential programming for adjudicated youths.

As front-line juvenile justice workers, we work with adjudicated children every day. We believe the state should increase and improve job training, support services and transitional programming to keep these children safe and help them succeed when they return to their communities. This is preferable to spending scarce state dollars building more facilities.

The Connecticut Juvenile Training School in Middletown has been vastly improved and is serving its intended purpose.

The plan that was proposed to close CJTS and open three or four new, smaller facilities has already run into trouble. Municipal leaders oppose siting them in their cities. And it will cost taxpayers tens of millions of bond-fund dollars to build them.

With healthy criticism by front-line workers, CJTS is improving. Vocational programs are now being emphasized, management is listening to workers with experience. Many things still need to improve. Staffing needs to match the population, programmatic commitments must be kept and effective transition for kids must be mandatory.

We agree that the \$57 million facility, built by the administration of former Gov. John G. Rowland in a corrupt deal with a construction company owned by the Tomasso family, was the result of a monumental public policy failure. Our unions forewarned this failure, but nobody listened.

However, those who assume that the current facility should not be part of the solution are wrong. CJTS provides a good base for the adjudicated young men who are placed there.

If the state wisely decides to transfer 16-

and 17-year-olds from the adult criminal system into the juvenile justice system, more safe and secure beds will be needed to provide programming, education and vocational training. We should plan for safe and secure state-run facilities instead of converting a needed and now-functioning school into office space.

Congratulations to the members of Connecticut's General Assembly for not overreacting to the governor's announcement that CJTS must be closed. They are acting with community, fiscal and programmatic responsibility.

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