

DRC DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER - NH

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July 1, 2026

Via e-mail Return Receipt Requested

The Honorable Kelly A. Ayotte
Governor of New Hampshire
State House
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301
GOVERNORAYOTTE@GOVERNOR.NH.GOV

Lori A. Weaver, Commissioner
Department of Health and Human Services
129 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
LORI.A.WEAVER@DHHS.NH.GOV

Dear Governor Ayotte and Commissioner Weaver,

Disability Rights Center – NH (“DRC-NH”) hereby notifies you of continuing safety concerns regarding the children at the Sununu Youth Services Center (“SYSC”) in Manchester, New Hampshire. Previously, on March 27, 2026, April 3, 2026, April 10, 2026, and April 17, 2026, DRC-NH notified the Division for Children, Youth and Families (“DCYF”) in writing of its serious concerns for the health and safety of the children at SYSC. DRC-NH notified DCYF on April 3, 2026, of its investigation into the use of restraint and seclusion at SYSC.

As part of our ongoing investigation, DRC-NH continues to visit SYSC and meet with children and staff, review records and videos, and gather other information. Based on direct observations by DRC-NH investigators and statements from multiple witnesses, the conditions and treatment of the children at SYSC continue to be of concern despite recent changes in the facility’s director, specifically the departure of former SYSC Director Joshua Nye on May 20, 2026, and the placement of DCYF Deputy Director Jennifer Ross as acting head of SYSC. While DCYF represented to the Oversight Commission on Children’s Services on May 29, 2026, that it had taken steps to address concerns, SYSC continues to fail in providing trauma-informed care and continues to use unlawful practices in violation of RSA 126-U, including multiple reports of a child kept in seclusion for approximately 10 hours, and a child kept in restraints for approximately 12 hours. These conditions have violated the rights of children in SYSC’s care and caused them serious physical and emotional harm.

During recent visits to SYSC, DRC-NH observed many concerning conditions, including a large puddle of urine in one child’s room after the child had reportedly been secluded for approximately 10 hours without access to a bathroom. DRC-NH has also recently observed other safety concerns for the children at SYSC, including but not limited to multiple staff with insufficient training, malfunctioning door locks in multiple locations, and unsanitary conditions on multiple units. In addition, DRC-NH recently

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observed dried blood on walls in rooms where children had engaged in self-harm, and a child who had significant bruising and lacerations caused by self-harm.

DRC-NH has also observed a marked reduction in the number of staff present in SYSC over the past three months. During our most recent visit, DRC-NH observed the presence of the New Hampshire State Police in the building at SYSC. An SYSC staff member confirmed that the State Police presence is due to the lack of staff. Both a staff member and child confirmed that the State Police are present during routine staff interactions with children. DRC-NH also observed that the State Police appeared to be armed. The use of armed law enforcement within SYSC during routine staff interactions with children is inconsistent with trauma-informed care and raises serious concerns regarding DCYF's ability to properly and safely administer the program.

Unless the Department of Health and Human Services ("Department") takes immediate corrective action, ensures SYSC is managed appropriately, and ceases its use of unlawful restraint and seclusion practices, children in SYSC's care face a substantial and continuing risk of serious harm. DRC-NH recommends that at a minimum DCYF retain an independent outside expert with appropriate expertise in juvenile justice and trauma-informed care to oversee and ensure the implementation of the substantial programmatic changes necessary to comply with state and federal law and safeguard the children in SYSC's care.

The State and Department must take immediate and direct action to protect children placed at SYSC and ensure their rights to trauma-informed therapeutic interventions, appropriate education programs, and freedom from abuse and neglect. DRC-NH's investigation remains open through continuing visits, interviews, and requests and reviews of relevant records.

Sincerely,



Michael Todd, Esq.
Special Projects Director
Disability Rights Center-NH

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