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—For section..... Voices/Viewpoint
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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 DCF must ground solutions in community care, dignity,
2 and justice — not just temporary stabilization

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 ‘We are particularly concerned that this investment in
4 congregate care places children at the Windham County Sheriff’s
5 Office in Brattleboro’

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 THE ROOT Social Justice Center affirms its ongoing
8 commitment to ensuring justice, care, and dignity for all children
9 and youth in Vermont, especially those impacted by the state
10 Department for Children and Families’ systems of custody.

11 We understand from recent reporting in the *Brattleboro*
12 *Reformer* and WCAX that the DCF Family Services Division has
13 recently signed a multi-year, \$21.5 million contract with the
14 Cornell Abraxas Group to operate a new crisis-stabilization
15 program for youth in DCF custody in Brattleboro. The program is
16 designed to serve children ages 10–18 who require short-term
17 support.

18 While The Root acknowledges the need for immediate
19 placement support, we remain opposed to models of congregate
20 care for children and youth in DCF custody that include or are
21 connected to law enforcement in any capacity and whose
22 facilities have a known history of abusing children.

23 We are particularly concerned that this investment in
24 congregate care places children at the Windham County Sheriff's
25 Office in Brattleboro.

26 Though Deputy Commissioner Aryka Radke emphasizes
27 the Sheriff has nothing to do with the program other than leasing
28 the space, this type of setting, even when intended for
29 stabilization, can replicate institutional dynamics that isolate
30 young people from their families, communities, and opportunities
31 for healing outside of confinement.

32 The Cornell Abraxas Group, an affiliate of Abraxas Youth
33 and Family Services, is currently under scrutiny for its
34 documented history of allegations of staff abuse towards children
35 in one of their facilities in Pennsylvania.

36 The Abraxas affiliate, Abraxas Alliance, agreed to a \$9
37 million federal grant to hold up to 30 unaccompanied migrant
38 children deemed dangers to themselves.

39 We know from statewide data that Vermont's Department
40 for Children and Families currently directs only 2% of its child
41 welfare budget toward prevention, while the overwhelming share
42 goes toward expensive out-of-home care.

43 This investment imbalance means that many families do
44 not get the help they need before things reach crisis levels.

45 * * *

46 THE ROOT CALLS ON the Vermont Department for Children
47 and Families (DCF) and our state’s policymakers to pursue and
48 expand effective, nonresidential solutions that truly meet the
49 needs of children and youth in DCF custody. Such solutions
50 include:

- 51 • Strengthening in-home support and preventive
52 resources so children can remain safely with their families and in
53 their communities whenever possible
- 54 • Investing in trauma-informed community programs that
55 address underlying needs rather than creating new placements
- 56 • Increasing support networks for families — including
57 culturally responsive services and advocacy — that help prevent
58 entry into the custody system
- 59 • Ensuring that oversight, accountability, and meaningful
60 youth and family voice are central to any care model that directly
61 impacts children.

62 We urge DCF to prioritize solutions grounded in
63 community care, dignity, and justice — not just temporary
64 stabilization — as part of a larger commitment to transformative
65 change for young people in our state.

66 The Root remains ready to collaborate with
67 policymakers, advocates, and impacted families to develop
68 alternatives that keep children safe, supported, and connected to
69 the communities they call home.

70 The Root is asking people to take action today by
71 contacting your state legislators and the Department for Children
72 and Families (DCF) to demand meaningful change.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

73 **THE ROOT SOCIAL JUSTICE CENTER** submitted this
74 statement via Britaney Watson, the center’s Families United
75 coordinator. Learn more about this issue and find ways to take
76 action by visiting therootsjc.org/dcftakeaction.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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