



# Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Leader

## NEWS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **Rep. Lancia Raises Concerns about Relocating Psychiatric Patients to the Training School**

STATE HOUSE -- Rep. Robert Lancia (R-Dist. 16, Cranston) is alarmed about plans to move some of the most dangerous psychiatric patients in Rhode Island to the Training School in Cranston.

The Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) has been renovating the Roosevelt Benton Center at the Training School with plans to move patients from Eleanor Slater Hospital to the facility after construction is completed in June. These would include the state's forensic population comprised of some of Rhode Island's most dangerous psychiatric patients including individuals convicted of violent crimes.

"I am worried about the safety of staff and patients as well as the residents of Cranston. This facility was designed to house young men awaiting trial not mental health patients at a high risk of harming themselves or others. There have also been escapes from the Roosevelt Brenton Center in the past and I am concerned about what could happen if one of these disturbed individuals were to find their way out and into our community," stated Rep. Lancia.

The Roosevelt Benton Center at the Training School opened in 2009 as part of a new \$62 million juvenile detention center but closed in 2017 after a number of violent incidents that left staff and residents wounded. The state has spent \$7 million to retrofit the facility to handle patients from Eleanor Slater Hospital but some, including members of the state's correctional community, have raised concerns that it may not be enough. They argue that psychiatric patients suffering from mental illnesses are much more difficult to control and that the facility itself may not be adequate to hold them no matter how much is spent to upgrade it.

The move comes after a report issued by the Joint Commission, a group that oversees medical facilities, warned that Eleanor Slater Hospital was in danger of losing its accreditation if it did not make substantial upgrades to ensure patient safety. Calls for the state to renovate the facility have persisted for years but little has been done to address the issues facing the ageing Phillippe Pinel and Adolph Meyer Buildings where patients are currently housed.

Rep. Lancia continued saying, "I understand that BHDDH is trying to find the best facility to treat these individuals but we should not sacrifice safety to accomplish that goal. Instead of



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finding a stop-gap solution the state should focus on a long term plan to adequately fund mental health care facilities that are designed from the ground up to house these patients.”

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