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The Legislative Gazette  
Mr. James Gormley, Editor  
P.O. Box 7329, Room 106  
Empire State Plaza, Concourse Level  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Mr. Gormley,

Your article on the legislative decision to keep two juvenile justice rehabilitation centers open is blatantly one sided and is incorrect on a number of points. Only one of these facilities, Great Valley Residential Center, is upstate, while Pyramid Reception Center is in the Bronx. Programs such as Great Valley have been intentionally run down, despite the fact that annually over 800 youth are committed to the custody of OCFS, only to be placed in private programs such as Berkshire Farms which was just put on special watch because of gang and drug activity. The inability of private programs to deal with these youth is reflected by the large number (one third) of these youth that are returned for placement in an OCFS facility. Furthermore, there are many youth from western New York who are placed in programs far from their homes who could be treated in Great Valley with the proper staffing to accommodate their complex needs.

The closure of Pyramid Reception Center and the transfer of reception services to another facility in Brooklyn not only closes the reception facility which just rated 99.6 out of 100 in an American Correctional Association accreditation report, it also removes a small local residential program from the placement choices for the many youth from New York City. The capital needs of Pyramid are greatly exaggerated and the funding was approved in prior years' budgets. The roof does not leak, there are no rats, and the removal of asbestos tiles has already been completed, as documented in the OCFS Capital 5 Year Plan.

The point that is repeatedly ignored is that OCFS has not documented that these alternative programs work for the youth in their care. OCFS has resisted release of evaluation of their own diversion programs, we suspect because the results were not favorable. Furthermore, most youth in OCFS facilities already failed in community based programs before being committed to OCFS' care. Both sides of this story deserve to be heard, and thankfully the Legislature has bothered to listen.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Brynien  
President