



Hospital task force plans to address disability group report

By CHRIS EHRMANN December 13, 2019

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — A task force formed to address concerns at the state’s only maximum-security psychiatric hospital met Friday to plan a meeting with a disability rights group that recently released a report detailing persistent problems at the state’s psychiatric hospitals.

The Connecticut Valley Hospital Whiting Forensic Task Force plans to meet with public health officials and members of Disability Rights Connecticut next year in wake of the Nov. 26 report that detailed concerns like staff using restraints as a form of discipline, a dependence on psychotropic medications and inadequate abuse and neglect reporting.

The task force was created after 10 Whiting staff members were arrested and 35 others were fired related to the abuse of a 62-year-old patient in 2017. A former nurse was sentenced to prison time on cruelty and disorderly conduct charges.

“The Disability Rights Connecticut report has gotten into details that this task force would never be able to attain,” said Linda Schwartz, co-chair of the task force. “I was very interested in what they found and I think they made some good suggestions that will help guide the recommendations of the committee.”

The report also suggested solutions, such as securing independent investigations into unanticipated deaths and having an accurate understanding of each patient’s identity and needs.

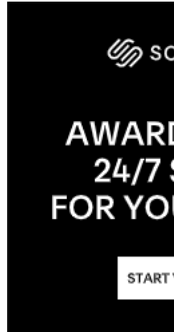
The meeting Friday went into an executive session where the task force met with patients at Dutcher, the medium-security unit on the hospital campus, to hear about their experiences. Task force co-chair Mike Lawlor said they will also speak with Whiting patients.

Mary Kate Mason, director of governmental affairs for the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, said they have reviewed the report and will work with the disability rights group on the findings.

Chris Ehrmann is a corps member for [Report for America](#), a nonprofit organization that supports local news coverage, in a partnership with The Associated Press for Connecticut. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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