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Suit wants high-security wing at state hospital to stay open

By PAT EATON-ROBB June 4, 2021

A lawsuit on behalf of patients was filed Thursday seeking to prevent the closure of a high-security unit at the Connecticut mental hospital that treats those acquitted of crimes by reason of insanity.

Lawyers with the advocacy groups Disability Rights

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care they need.

The state recently decided to close the unit, one of six high-security units in the hospital, and consolidate other services amid staff shortages, according to the lawsuit.

The state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, which runs Whiting, said it could not comment on pending litigation.

The lawsuit, which was filed in U.S. District Court in Bridgeport, alleges, among other things, that as result of the closure and recent merger of two units at Whiting, “some patients with a history of conflicts, including past assaults, and thereafter placed in separate units, are now being placed together in the same unit, increasing the ‘risk of serious harm.’”

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on May 17 and by this week,

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hospital's legal obligations.

The plaintiffs are asking for a temporary restraining order, saying the moves violate a January 1991 consent decree, an agreement between the state and lawyers for patients that outlines treatment and other conditions at Whiting.

That decree was part of the fallout from a 1989 case in which a patient, David Peterson, escaped from Whiting and stabbed a 9-year-old girl to death during a street fair in downtown Middletown.

As a result of the escape and killing, the hospital confined all forensic patients to the hospital building regardless of risk. Lawyers for patients sued, eventually entering into the subsequent consent decree.

The provisions of that agreement require that all of the decisions regarding patients' treatment be made based on clinical assessments and through a comprehensive treatment planning process, according to the lawsuit.

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patients' therapeutic needs are

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