



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Senator Murphy: Latest Incident at Hawthorne Cedar Knolls is the Last Straw

TERRENCE MURPHY January 24, 2018

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ALBANY, NY - Those who do not learn from their mistakes are doomed to repeat them. Unfortunately, the same can be said for the Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Treatment Center. For the past several years, Cedar Knolls has repeatedly made headlines for incidents running the gamut from gangs of children threatening local citizens to students being steered into the seamy world of trafficking for sex.

One of the latest incidents earlier this week involved a seventeen-year-old resident with mental health issues who escaped from the facility unattended. She broke into a local home, obtained a box-cutter, and confronted the owners - parents who suddenly had to be concerned for the safety of their three-year-old daughter who was napping nearby.

This potentially volatile incident was the proverbial last straw that broke the camel's back. Adding insult to injury, neighbors reported seeing students casually wandering the streets of Mt. Pleasant at 5:00 a.m. this morning when the campus was supposed to be locked down.

Reacting strongly to these incidents, Senator Terrence Murphy and Mt. Pleasant Town Supervisor Carl Fulgenzi sent a letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo demanding that swift and concrete measures be taken to finally secure the facility. The letter called for the immediate intervention of the State Police to secure the facility, as well as conduct an independent security audit of the special act school district, the residential treatment center and residential treatment facilities. Senator Murphy, who chairs the State Senate's Investigations and Government Operations Committee, will oversee these matters as they move forward.

"While we appreciate the rapid response and evaluation by both the Office of Children and Family Services and the Office of Mental Health, the reality is we have been down this road before," said Senator Murphy. "Enough is enough. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. The Jewish Board of Family and Children Services must be held accountable for the latest episode stemming from the campus of Hawthorne Cedar Knolls. That is why Supervisor Fulgenzi and I are calling for the immediate deployment of the State Police to help secure the campus. There needs to be heightened security twenty-four-seven on the campus. We cannot and will not allow another member of the community to be terrorized, or create a situation where a student is in danger

of harming themselves."

Supervisor Fulgenzi stated, "I want a lockdown on the campus where no one leaves unless in a vehicle with a specific approved destination. This is to protect those on campus as well as local residents. I do not want this to be secure facility in the sense that it will be used as a place where more violent individuals will be placed. I question the safety and security of the facilities, the qualifications of the staff, the ratio of staff to students, and the qualifications of the medical staff. These are questions that have to be asked for the sake of the community and the children. Moving forward, we will be having a discussion on the possibility of an outside company running the facilities."

The Hawthorne Cedar Knolls Treatment Center has long been a hotbed for controversial headlines. In April 2017, four residents of Cedar Knolls pushed a local restaurant owner after refusing to pay their bill. A month later, residents of the residential facility allegedly assaulted an elderly woman on the platform of the Valhalla Train Station taking money and her cell phone. The controversies continued when a teenaged girl missing from Cedar Knolls turned up in the Bronx with a 25-year-old man.

Cedar Knolls adopted an action plan geared towards residents leaving the campus without authorization and increasing security around the facility's perimeter, including installing more security cameras, a security booth and a perimeter fence. The treatment facility, which is managed by the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services, stopped taking in new residents. The steps reduced the number of calls to the police and fire departments, but the latest incidents have sent the facility careening back to square one.