

Dear Legislators,

I am a mental health professional working in Vermont and a resident of Brattleboro. I am writing as a private citizen to express my opposition to the state building the new locked psychiatric hospital, Middlesex Replacement Facility. In my professional role I have seen first-hand the harm and trauma that can be caused by psychiatric incarceration, particularly use of restraint, seclusion, and other coercive or involuntary practices. It is also important to note that Psychiatric incarceration disproportionately harms BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and poor Vermonters; at a time when we are working to end systemic inequalities in prisons and policing, creating more carceral institutions is moving us in the wrong direction. Vermont has a desperate and chronic need for increased funding for community resources and hospital alternatives. If we truly want to create mental health systems that support healing we should be focusing our resources on creating peer-run respites, expanding community supports, and ending homelessness. Vermont needs to invest in community solutions, not incarceration.

Thank you,  
Ethan Hazzard-Watkins, MSW  
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