



ISSUE BRIEF

Vol 1

Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. is a statewide non-profit that works to promote individual growth, human rights, and systems transformation through advocacy, education, and support.

As a peer-run organization, our staff is comprised of individuals who identify as recipients of mental health and/or addiction services. We share our experiences navigating community resources, recognizing our innate capacity to heal, and moving forward to achieve our full potential.

Allegations of Abuse at Whiting Forensic Division of Connecticut Valley Hospital

This past Tuesday, October 10, 2017, Senator Heather Somers hosted a press conference at the Connecticut Legislative Office Building to bring legislative attention to the allegations of abuse at the Whiting Forensic Division of Connecticut Valley Hospital.¹ Allegations were reported against Whiting staff videotaped abusing a person receiving care.² To date thirty-one employees have been suspended from Whiting, and nine have been arrested.³ This includes nine individuals removed from Whiting after the investigation began as it was reported that alleged abuse continued within the unit.^{4,5}

During the press conference, Senator Somers stated, “what we have read in the police reports is a lack of humanity, a culture of cruelty, and a complete disregard for rules, regulations, and common decency.” Senator Somers called for a public hearing by the end of the month. The Senator was joined by Senator George Logan and Representative Prasad Srinivasan who encouraged an immediate review of healthcare delivery and administrative oversight across Connecticut Valley Hospital. This is an important step forward, and we are grateful that Connecticut leadership is raising this issue as a legislative priority.

In response to the reported abuse, Advocacy Unlimited was compelled to provide opportunities for community conversations on this important issue. To date, AU hosted three conversations with more than 55 community members in attendance. Attendees ranged from concerned citizens, individuals previously detained within Whiting, family members, policy makers, people who identify as having received services across the mental health system of Connecticut, and direct care service staff.

The first two discussions explored what brought us together, the current paradigm of support, and how we will respond as a community to the allegations and documented incidence of abuse. The third conversation identified specific action steps that we can take to address the issue of systemic abuse at Connecticut Valley Hospital.

Attendees reported that they came to the conversations out of concern. Many shared personal experience receiving inadequate care, and too often negligent care, within deplorable conditions across psychiatric facilities and agencies. Given the consistency in reporting across groups, it is clear that the reprehensible abuse at Whiting points to a systemic breakdown in the perceived value of a human life. Whiting is only the tip of the iceberg. It was indicated that a restructuring of our mental health system is needed.

A direct outcome of our conversations is a set of recommendations for systems reform - beginning with CVH. Recommendations fall into five distinct categories, including oversight, training, advocacy, support, and legislative action. Advocacy Unlimited believes that it is critical for systems reform to include individuals who have direct experience navigating mental health services in the process of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

It is clear that our systems of care must become responsive and compassionate towards the individuals they are trusted, employed, and - within state operated psychiatric facilities - mandated, to support.

We will continue to release updates on this important issue, with conversations planned in the coming weeks throughout the state. For more information, or for media inquiries, please contact Greg Benson, Assistant Executive Director, at GBenson@advocacyunlimited.org or by phone at (860) 997-1945.

¹ <https://www.ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=14645>

² <http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-inspection-finds-widespread-whiting-patient-abuses-20170830-story.html>

³ <http://www.ct.gov/despp/cwp/view.asp?Q=596030&A=4226>

⁴ <http://fox61.com/2017/09/28/3-more-workers-at-whiting-removed-from-patient-care/>

⁵ <http://www.wfsb.com/story/36594346/6-more-employees-on-leave-in-cvh-abuse-investigation>