



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES**  
*A Healthcare Service Agency*

DANNEL P. MALLOY  
GOVERNOR

MIRIAM E. DELPHIN-RITTMON, Ph.D.  
COMMISSIONER

Good Morning Senator Somers, Senator Gerratana, Representative Steinberg and members of the Public Health Committee. I'm Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon and I have with me Paul Dileo, Chief Operating Officer of DMHAS and Dr. Michael Norko – the newly appointed Director of Whiting Forensic Division.

Thank you for meeting with us this morning to discuss the horrific abuse that took place at the maximum security unit at Whiting Forensic Division. I, as Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, have a duty to the Public Health Committee, and to the people of the state of Connecticut, to inform you of the steps I have taken to date to address this reprehensible abuse, and what I plan to do in the future to make sure that such appalling incidents never occur again.

Since this abuse has come to light, I have had numerous conversations with patients and staff at Whiting, along with many other concerned citizens, and am acutely aware that they, and you, are counting on me and the Department to take the steps necessary to protect our patients from such abuse and assure things like this can never happen again. I appreciate all of the input and recommendations we have received from advocates and others who want to join us in righting this wrong and look forward to working with them in the days to come to promote healing among all parties.

Since the early 2000s, we have worked very hard to make the Connecticut mental health system a model for other states to follow based on our deep and abiding commitment to honoring the dignity and worth of every individual in our care. This abuse incident has called into question our fundamental values and vision for the safe delivery of respectful and compassionate care, and you can be assured that our response has been, and will continue to be, both swift and strong.

When notified of the allegations of abuse, I reviewed the video evidence myself—which sickened me and has haunted me ever since—and then I immediately contacted the State Police to ask them to take the lead in investigating these incidents in partnership with DMHAS police. We also notified the Department of Public Health, which operates as the state survey agency for the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who then initiated an investigation of their own.

Due to the seriousness of the allegations, I immediately removed the leadership of the Division – the Whiting Director and Whiting's Director of Nursing – and throughout the course of the investigation, 35 additional staff were removed from service as soon as I became aware of their

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potential involvement. To date, seven staff members have been separated from state service, and ten have been arrested.

Finally, upon conclusion of the state police's criminal investigation, the Department began our own human resources investigation. To date 90 individuals have been interviewed as part of this investigation. Our investigation is ongoing, and must follow all relevant state laws, agency policies, and collective bargaining agreements. When the human resources investigation is completed, we will determine what additional disciplinary action is appropriate given investigations findings.

It is indeed very troubling that 37 staff have been implicated in these incidents, and that these abuses were not reported by Whiting staff themselves. We are working hard to understand how this could have happened and what other measures we should take to ensure that this will never happen again. In addition to removing the top two administrators, we moved the CVH Chief Operating Officer's office so that it is now physically located within Whiting, making this person more available to staff and patients. We have also contracted with a security firm to provide around-the-clock monitoring of the live camera feeds. Although the Whiting facility already contained many security cameras, around-the-clock monitoring was not considered a best practice because we, like other hospitals, needed to balance the Department's need for surveillance with our patients' need for, and right to, privacy. In the wake of recent abuse, however, we have dedicated considerable resources to enhancing the monitoring system and to using it as one tool to ensure the safety of our patients.

Let us be clear, however, there is no single solution to this complex problem. In order to address the range of issues involved in as timely, coherent, and effective a manner as possible, I have secured a commitment from Dr. Michael Norko to serve as Whiting Director to lead our current and future efforts at systemic reform. Dr. Norko is a Professor at Yale, and has become a national leader in the area of forensic psychiatry, serving as the immediate past President of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, and currently the Chair of the Forensic Division of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. Among his many other accomplishments, Dr. Norko also previously worked at Whiting, including as Director, from 1993 through 1996, and again from 2005 to 2007. Dr. Norko is a highly regarded and experienced forensic professional, and will be entrusted with ensuring that all individuals at Whiting, both patients and staff alike, are treated with the utmost dignity and respect.

In addition to this important change in leadership, the removal and prosecution of offending staff members, and the hiring and training of new employees, we will be bringing in a behavioral health consulting group to use external expertise to help us identify and rectify additional systemic issues that need to be changed. We also are hiring peer recovery support specialists, who are persons in recovery from serious mental illnesses and hospitalizations

themselves, and who stand for and role model the reality of recovery for both patients and staff alike. In our deployment of recovery support specialists throughout other facilities within DMHAS, we have found that their very presence can be transformative to the environment of care, bringing hope and a renewed sense of determination, on a day-to-day basis, to promoting the recovery and overall well-being of the people we are privileged to serve.

For the over 100,000 people we serve each year, DMHAS strives to offer such a beacon of hope and to embody a sense of determination. I am still shocked, and remain deeply angered and saddened, that these incidents of cruelty occurred and have threatened to diminish our effectiveness in fulfilling this mission. I welcome your involvement and support in ensuring that this does not happen, and in safeguarding the dignity of all of the people we serve now and into the future.