

State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



CVH WHITING TASK FORCE

Meeting Summary

July 9, 2020 at 12:30 PM

Zoom Videoconference

This meeting follows the last Task Force meeting of February 28, 2020. The four-month pause was a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Members discussed the impact of the pandemic on the Connecticut Valley and Whiting Forensic Hospitals. Additionally, discussion included strategies for the task force to move forward towards the goal of writing an interim and final report required by [PA 18-86](#). Members debated the nature of future meetings during Covid-19 and unanimously agreed that the Task Force would continue their work through virtual meetings. Future invited speakers and presenters will include the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, unions, hospital patients, their families, and hospital staff, victim advocacy groups, community providers, and the general public.

Co-chairwoman Linda Schwartz convened the meeting.

Ms. Schwartz asked Ms. Hauser about the state of Whiting Forensic Hospital during the covid-19 pandemic.

Ms. Hauser answered that a total of 10 patients have tested positive for covid-19, and they have all recovered. She added that a total of 23 staff have tested positive. Some staff did not have the opportunity to be tested but were symptomatic and assumed to be positive. With all this staff not working, the hospital strategized on staff fulfilments if it continues to have a significant amount of them test positive and therefore unable to work.

Ms. Alisberg noted that a lawsuit has been filed against the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) with respect to the handling of covid-19 which will show a different picture of the internal strategies of the hospital.

Mr. Lawlor asked Ms. Hauser about census changes since the beginning of the pandemic.

Ms. Hauser answered that the competency unites have dramatically decreased.

Ms. Alisberg asked whether patients are sharing rooms, and the steps the hospital follows if a patient is tested positive while they are in a double room.

Ms. Hauser stated that she is almost certain patients are not sharing rooms, and that immediately after suspecting that a patient is positive, even before they are tested, they are placed in an isolation unit separated from everyone else. She added that staff were tested weekly, but the patients were not.

Ms. Alisberg asked why the patients were not tested weekly.

Ms. Schwartz stated that she does not find the line of questioning posed by Ms. Alisberg to be appropriate due to the covid-19 lawsuit.

Dr. Rodis added that from a physician perspective, it is understandable that staff would be tested more frequently because they are the ones who come in and out of the hospital.

Ms. Mason noted that DMHAS will answer questions related to covid-19 if the task force forwards them their questions.

Ms. Schwartz advanced the discussion to the interim report of the task force. She asked members whether they are of the opinion that the interim report should have recommendations.

Ms. Alisberg stated that because of the limitations covid-19 has placed on interviews and meetings, the task force needs to ask for an extension for the final report.

Mr. Lawlor expressed that members must work towards the goal of meeting their current deadline and reserve the decision on asking for an extension at a later date.

Staff members noted that while in person meetings, interviews or public hearings cannot be accomplished during the pandemic, we have the capability of utilizing other avenues to speak to the public and hear their opinions and concerns. Through the use of zoom, webinar, and teams, the task force can accomplish any type of meeting through phone or video conferences that they would accomplish in person. Staff agreed with Mr. Lawlor in reserving an ask for a report extension until members are certain they are unable to meet the January 2021 deadline. Staff added that in the meantime, a letter detailing completed work should be sent to the Public Health Committee (PHC) leadership.

Members unanimously agreed that a letter should be sent to PHC leadership. Following, a lengthy discussion of future meeting invitees took place resulting in a comprehensive list which included the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, unions, hospital patients, their families, and hospital staff, victim advocacy groups, community providers, and the general public.

The next meeting of the task force will take place either on July 22, 2020 or July 29, 2020 depending on attendance availability of unions and victim's advocacy groups to present to the task force.