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**IN WAKE OF CLOSURE OF ST. MARY’S HOME FOR CHILDREN, DRRI AND ACLU RI
CALL UPON RHODE ISLAND TO COMMIT ITS RESOURCES TO COMMUNITY-BASED
SERVICES**

Disability Rights Rhode Island (DRRI) and the ACLU of RI are pleased that St. Mary’s Home for Children will shut down operations entirely and transition its outpatient and educational services to Tides Behavioral Health, as announced by the St. Mary’s Board of Directors on August 20, 2024. The closure also terminates Tides’ plan to reopen and expand the troubled Residential Treatment Facility (RTF) at St. Mary’s.

As DRRI has advocated for years, RTFs *do not work*. Children and teens suffer physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in them. They are over-medicated and traumatized. In a June 2024 hearing regarding these RTFs, the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance found that RTFs “do not provide the care that children with complex needs require.” [In its report](#), the Committee identified that “States have historically inappropriately overused RTF placements as a ‘solution’ for children with complex behavioral health needs... without investing in robust community-based services or exhausting the available in-community services.” The Committee echoed the long-time call from children, families, and advocates to invest in such services.

Thanks to the youth who spoke out about their experiences of abuse, neglect, and trauma, DRRI, and the Office of the Child Advocate, the state’s practice of warehousing children at St. Mary’s became public. The state has rightfully refused the application to reopen and expand the RTF there.

“This is a very positive result,” said Morna Murray, Executive Director of DRRI. “Children do not belong in residential treatment centers. These facilities have conclusively been shown to worsen children’s behavioral health and create new and long-lasting traumas. We call upon the state to meet its legal obligation to provide robust community services and supports to vulnerable children and young adults who need our help.”

“We know this is a question of priorities, not availability of funding,” said Steven Brown, Executive Director of the ACLU of Rhode Island. The state spends millions of dollars to send children to out-of-state RTFs, including at least one operated by Devereux, a company cited for multiple incidents of sexual abuse in the Committee on Finance’s report. The state is also spending thousands of dollars on consultant reports to identify facts that are already well established: Rhode Island does not have sufficient evidence-based community services for children.

DRRI and the ACLU of Rhode Island call upon the governor and all elected officials to fund community-based services and supports that will help youth in need. Rhode Island must divert the millions it spends on warehouses of neglect and invest in a full continuum of child-centered services.