

# NEBRASKA

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DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



Pete Ricketts, Governor

February 6, 2020

Senator Sara Howard  
District #9 State Capitol  
P.O. Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

RE: LB 1150

Senator Howard and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) would like to provide an opposition letter noting its concerns regarding LB 1150. DHHS requests that this letter be formally included in the record. I would be testifying in person, but I am testifying today before the Judiciary Committee on a related issue.

LB 1150, introduced by Senator Brandt, would require that the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) facilities in Kearney and Geneva be fully staffed and operational by July 1, 2021, with Kearney serving male juveniles and Geneva serving female juveniles. This bill would limit the department's ability to treat youth committed to its care through the YRTC system by requiring it to revert back to the former model of serving the YRTC population.

The Department has transitioned to a multi-campus system, as outlined in the 2019 YRTC Business Plan. A systems model allows for population-specific programming, intensive behavioral interventions when needed, and physical structure for youth safety and security.

As the Department has testified before, an inability to properly staff the Geneva facility did not allow the department to successfully serve female youth under the former model. However, at the YRTC hearing held in Geneva on October 2, 2019, the Department was moved by the commitment and response of the Geneva community. While the staffing difficulties preclude DHHS from operating a full range of treatment and programming for YRTC female youth on that campus, the Department realized the potential of the campus to successfully support a small re-entry program for young women preparing to return to their homes. Geneva has now taken on a new purpose as part of the multi-campus YRTC system.

The Department has met with Geneva stakeholders several times over the past few months, most recently on January 6, 2020. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel in Geneva – particularly for security and clinical staff – has been discussed in depth. In addition, the Department has explained the new role of the Geneva campus in supporting re-entry for a small group of females, supported by 13 dedicated staff. With stakeholder support, DHHS has also opened 25 Medicaid eligibility support positions at the administration building on the Geneva campus, and has been successful in recruiting and hiring staff for those roles.

Should you have any questions, you may reach me via email at [dannette.smith@nebraska.gov](mailto:dannette.smith@nebraska.gov) or by phone at (402) 471-9433.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share the above information.

Sincerely,



Dannette R. Smith, MSW  
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Senator Tom Brandt