

Advocates, opposition decry lack of residential care for mentally ill youth

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Leanne

Vatcher isn't happy with Health Minister Ross Wiseman. Her daughter recently spent 10 months in the Janeway without receiving treatment for her mental illness.

Vatcher and more than 20 others were at the opening of the fall session of the House of Assembly Tuesday as the Liberal Opposition grilled Wiseman about a five-year-old report that recommends more be done for mentally ill youth in the province.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones told the House the Janeway can't help.

"According to hospital administrators, this unit was designed as a short-term acute care unit for young people with behavioural problems, not as a treatment centre for mentally ill youth," she said.

Jones says the 2003 report outlines significant problems with youth services in the province.

"Many of these problems have worsened each year, yet government has not made serious efforts to deal with this specific group or to implement most of these recommendations," said Jones. "This report recommended that there be a facility that could accommodate 12 youth with mental illness, emotional disorders and concurrent disorders."

Looking at report

Wiseman told the House that three weeks ago he asked his staff to dig out the report and have another look.

"I've asked officials in the department to revisit that report to determine if there's merit in moving forward with the recommendations," he said.

After question period, Vatcher spoke to reporters about what Wiseman said in the House and summed it up in two words, "Very disappointing."

"He talks about programs and services. I asked the Child Youth Advocate myself directly, are there any programs and services. She told me 'no,'" said Vatcher.

Vatcher says children who have mental illnesses in this province just fall through the cracks.

But she's somewhat encouraged that the minister will have another look at the 2003 report.

Wiseman told reporters, as the minister and a parent, he takes the issue seriously.

"Anytime we talk about children and the health services that they get and the kind of supports that they get (we) recognize what we do for them today will influence the rest of their lives and it's important we give them the foundation they need early in life," he said.

Issue not taken 'seriously enough'

"By the mere fact that they've not dealt with the report, they've not looked at the recommendations is evidence to me that they've not taken the issue seriously enough," said Jones.

— Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram



Leanne Vatcher is the mother of a teen with mental health issues who says she wants better care for young people. — Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram

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Jones.

She says it costs the province about \$13 million a year to send youth out of the province for treatment, so it makes economic sense to have a treatment centre here.

She also says there is a social cost when a mentally ill child has to leave home, their families and friends.

That was echoed by NDP Leader Lorraine Michael.

"It bothers me that the minister and ... the Department of Health don't seem to understand the negative impact on families of having to have individuals go elsewhere for treatment, especially with children," she said.

Jones said in February there were 58 youth being treated for a variety of mental illnesses outside of the province.

Wiseman told reporters Tuesday that number is currently at 38.