



STATEMENT BY CHILDREN FIRST

Papering Over Past Abuses, Clock Tower Should Not Be Permitted to Operate

February 7, 2023

Children First strongly opposes the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' (DHS) recent action to approve a license allowing Clock Tower Schools to reopen the shuttered Glen Mills Schools. Glen Mills was a dangerous facility that closed for a reason, and now has been rebranded and relicensed with the same leadership and staff and monitored by the same state agency that failed to detect rampant abuse.

Glen Mills was closed in 2019 following a [Philadelphia Inquirer investigation](#) exposing decades of children beaten by staff and intimidated to ensure their silence, along with the abject failure of DHS to protect youth forced to live in a systematically abusive detention center. Since the initial investigation, hundreds more former Glen Mills students have come forward, disclosing that they were also victimized and decrying years of inaction by the State to guarantee the safety of children in a facility paid \$52,000 in taxpayer funds per child per year, totaling over \$40 million in revenue in the last year of operation.

DHS denied the renamed facility's application to reopen less than a year ago, citing failure to meet licensing requirements. The troubling announcement of the new license was silent regarding what changed to justify sudden approval within the last days of the Wolf Administration.

Meanwhile, the Executive Director of Clock Tower Schools is a former Glen Mills leader. In addition to his prior role as assistant executive director, Spriggs also served as Glen Mills' director of regulatory compliance. This means he was charged with ensuring the facility met all licensing standards – something Glen Mills more than failed to do when it permitted the violent assault of students. Carolyn Seagraves, Clock Tower's current board president, was a 15-year member of the Glen Mills' Board of Trustees, overseeing the institution when abuse was rampant and covered up. Seven other former Glen Mills staff will be allowed to join the team at the new facility as well, despite media accounts that allege that former staff boasted of beating up children while drinking at local bars.

DHS points to the fact that these individuals have sworn under oath that they had no knowledge of the abuse taking place, though it is near impossible that the ongoing violence, coercion, and cover-ups across multiple Glen Mills campus buildings went simply unnoticed by employees or members of the board. As ill-advised as this re-licensure is, the State should have required that 100% of the new entity's staff and board have no prior history with Glen Mills as a condition of licensure.

The new license permits Clock Tower Schools to house 20 boys court-ordered to residential treatment. They also have an open invitation to ask the State for permission to house more young people after one year. DHS will reportedly provide additional oversight of the new facility. However, when responding to past complaints about Glen Mills, DHS interviewed children in front of the staff who abused them, allowed children to remain in the facility during investigations, and failed to identify patterns of abuse despite

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repeated reports. There is no reason to believe, given the extent to which the violence went unchecked by DHS in the past, that DHS monitoring would stop it from happening again. The Department has yet to explain how it will ensure children are safe this time.

The decision to license Clock Tower Schools comes not long after a judge ordered DHS to take custody of 15 young people being held at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Center (PJJC) in West Philadelphia due to overcrowding. A lawsuit, filed by the City in October 2022, noted unsafe conditions at the PJJC, including youth sleeping in the admissions area. A [2021 report](#) by the Juvenile Court Judges Commission highlighted a decrease in the availability of and access to secure detention beds because 15 detention facilities across the state had closed over a 15-year period. If DHS granted a license to Clock Tower in response to this shortage, they should develop a better strategy to create trauma-focused, healing-centered environments rather than reopening a facility known to inflict significant harm on the children in its care.

Not only does this decision have the potential to harm young people, but it also puts Pennsylvania taxpayers at risk. Already, the Chester County Intermediate Unit will pay a \$3 million settlement associated with the abuse at Glen Mills. That \$3 million is likely just the beginning of payouts the Commonwealth will be required to provide to the victims abused by Glen Mills staff while under the watch of state agencies.

Clock Tower Schools should have never been granted a license, but given the current situation, we believe the following policies must be adopted to protect children and communities:

- Given the known risk of harm to children, DHS should implement 24-hour on-site monitoring. This monitoring should include regular meetings with youth living there, away from staff, to ensure that any abuse is identified immediately.
- During investigation of any complaint regarding Clock Tower Schools, DHS should suspend new admissions and remove all children from the facility pending findings to prevent potential additional harm.
- Clock Tower Schools should not be granted additional licensure for at least two years, so that youth exiting the program can describe their experiences freely and without intimidation.
- Clock Tower Schools should place at least 50% of its annual revenue in escrow to fund potential damages resulting from lawsuits associated with abuse.
- DHS must immediately lead the development of solutions that ensure children placed for juvenile detention are in safe, healing, non-secure facilities.

We urge Governor Shapiro to understand that communities are safer when children receive the emotional support they need to make the right decisions. There is no evidence to indicate that such support is provided in detention facilities.

The development of new ways to help youth heal must be a priority. For the new administration to live up to its commitment to public safety and focusing on our children's future, it must ensure all of Pennsylvania's youth have access to quality education, home and community-based behavioral health services – and for those youth who do commit crimes – alternatives to detention and secure residential treatment that allow them to heal, take accountability, and learn from their mistakes while remaining in their communities.