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October 1, 2020

Pursuant to Sec. 5 of Act 140 of 2020, attached please find the interim report from the Agency of Human Services and the Brattleboro Retreat on the steps taken by the Brattleboro Retreat to improve communications and relations with its employees. The final report, to include an update and an assessment of the effectiveness of these efforts, will be submitted on or before February 1, 2021.

—MEMO—

TO: Joint Fiscal Committee  
Chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare  
Chair of the House Committee on Health Care  
FROM: The Brattleboro Retreat and the Vermont Agency of Human Services  
DATE: October 1, 2020  
RE: Interim Report on Steps to Improve Communication and Relations  
with Employees at the Brattleboro Retreat

In accordance with H. 960 the Brattleboro Retreat in conjunction with the Agency of Human Services (AHS) is submitting an interim report on steps taken to improve communication and relations with Retreat employees.

We do so with the clear understanding that communication within any organization is central to achieving its mission, building trust, improving job satisfaction and enhancing all employee performance, be they line staff, managers, or administrators. We cannot stress enough that our employees at all levels of the organization are essential to meeting the Retreat's core mission of strong patient outcomes.

This is something the Retreat has worked at throughout its 186-year history. It has taken on even greater importance in recent years given the Retreat's financial stressors, the increased role it has taken in Vermont's health care landscape, and most recently as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

With that in mind, our recent efforts to communicate with employees have been built around the Sustainability Plan (SP), which was established in partnership with (AHS). Under the guidance of AHS, we continue to meet regularly to assess progress on the implementation of the plan.

Before sharing examples of the work done to date, we want to underscore that communication is an opportunity to listen, to share ideas, and to find the common ground to allow our organization to weather difficult times.

That said, it is also crucial to recognize that we need to communicate where we differ as well as where we agree. Improving communication and relations does not mean we always agree when hard decisions need to be made. But it does mean that whatever action is taken, it is done so in a respectful and genuine manner.

With these thoughts in mind, the Retreat has and will continue to pursue a number of avenues (both formal and informal) for communicating with employees and improving relations. These include regular rounding by our CEO and CNO, and a series of informal, face-to-face meetings with our VP of Human Resources and union leaders on ideas to contain labor costs.

We have established an SP home page on the Retreat's intranet and posted a copy of the SP for all to read. To help employees better understand the work before us we have produced a series of four videos providing updates on the Sustainability Plan and our collaboration with AHS.

Since March, our CEO has published nine articles (CEO Corners) on the hospital's intranet covering issues such as the Sustainability Plan, the Retreat's overall financial picture, and COVID-19. In an effort to ensure social distancing the Retreat has adapted the format of its quarterly Employee Town Hall meetings with a virtual approach that allows employees to submit questions electronically and have them answered by senior leaders through video.

We have also produced a series of videos for staff on COVID-19 and have established a COVID-19 home page on the hospital's intranet with comprehensive resources and information for employees. To acknowledge our staff we have installed outdoor banner messaging (visible to the public) that celebrates their courage and commitment to our patients.

Each month we post an intranet article welcoming new employees. And we have continued our annual tradition of holding an Employee Service Award ceremony and an Employee Appreciation Day picnic.

We will continue with these efforts and provide a final report by February 1, 2021. We thank you for your consideration.