

Hillcrest Listening Session Feedback
July 25, 2023
Xavier University



Thank you to everyone who attended Hamilton County Juvenile Court's first ever public listening session. Not including staff, we had 45 in-person attendees, of which 13 made public comments. We had 16 Zoom participants, with five adding written comments.

All comments have been recorded, reviewed, discussed and considered as the Court prepares a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Hillcrest property. Court Administrator Liz Igoe shared the Court's top three priorities for the next provider are education, trauma-informed therapy, and a transition plan for children upon release.

Broad themes heard from the community are listed below as well as answers, to the best of our current ability, to the questions posed during the session. We will continue to keep the public informed of this process moving forward.

Broad Themes from July 25 Listening Session

- Retaining Hillcrest's educational charter and providing extensive educational opportunities, from college prep to vocational training, is imperative. The message was clear: Do not close Hillcrest School.
- Hillcrest is a unique asset and needs to be retained as a residential treatment program and school.
- The children who are sent to Hillcrest require wraparound services to successfully reenter the community and become productive, successful people.
- Consider local operators and partners. There is a perception that we often look outside our own community for answers, even though we have qualified providers and resources here at home.
- Listen to kids who have been through the system and staff who have worked in our local juvenile justice system.
- There is a concern for our neighbors who are employed by ROP and will lose their job when the ROP contract ends.

Q&A

- **What are your future plans for the Hillcrest facility?** The future plan for Hillcrest is to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) in September 2023, to identify a new management team for the facility. An evaluation of the property by Hamilton County facilities, received days after the listening session, indicates it will require at least 10 months of repair and renovation before the Hillcrest property will be ready to re-open.

The contract with Rites of Passage (ROP) was officially scheduled to end in April 2024. In May 2023, the Court and Hamilton County Board of Commissioners notified ROP that the contract would not be continued, and would end early. Then, ROP asked to remain the operator for the full length of the contract. The County agreed, however ROP announced at the listening session that it would end its contract with Hillcrest on July 31, 2023.

- **Is ROP a for-profit company?** Yes
- **Who owns the property now?** Hamilton County owns the property. In 1976, jurisdiction of the property was given to HCJC as an educational and residential treatment facility for court-involved youth.
- **Do you plan to find another operator to run the facility?** Yes. Once the RFP is issued, all potential operators are welcome and encouraged to submit a proposal. The Court is also interested in collaborative proposals to meet the various functions of the facility.
- **Do you plan to keep it as a residential correctional facility?** Actually, Hillcrest has never been a correctional facility. It is an educational and residential treatment facility and will remain as such.
- **Will it have a high school?** The school serves children of all grade levels, including high school.
- **What changes do you expect to make in its operation?** Our criteria for selecting a provider include requirements for a strong education program, trauma-informed therapy, and transition plan back into the community. Based on what we've heard from the community, the Court is considering a multi-use facility dedicated to Hamilton County youth.
- **Is there a plan to address the increase in youth gun violence?** Gun violence is a major concern across our community. The court is working in partnership with local organizations to find solutions to this widespread issue.
- **How long will the process take to select a new provider?** Our plan is to have the RFP contract to the Prosecutor's office for review by mid-August. We expect it will be issued in the fall with a goal to identify the next provider by early 2024. An evaluation of the property by Hamilton County facilities, received days after the listening session, indicates it will require at least 10 months of repair and renovation before the Hillcrest property will be ready to re-open.
- **What are the criteria for selection?** The criteria will be outlined in the RFP we are currently in process of writing.

- **Who will be on the review committee?** The proposals submitted to the Court will be reviewed by our administrative team as well as our HCJC Advisory Board, along with members of the County Administration.
- **How transparent will the process be?** We will publicly share the RFP and the list of organizations/entities that submit a proposal.
- **Will the Court consider proposals from local bidders?** Absolutely. Our role is to draft the RFP, outlining the specific requirements for providers. We encourage local providers, either as sole entities or in partnership with other organizations who can run different parts of the program, to submit a proposal. Our ultimate goal is to create the best possible education and residential treatment program across the country.
- **Would we consider establishing a Citizen Advisory Council for Hillcrest?** If there is interest in an advisory board specifically for Hillcrest Academy, the Court is open to adding one or making it a sub-committee of the HCJC Advisory Board. The Court recently revived its internal HCJC Advisory Board, which had been dormant for over a decade. The work of that board includes review and feedback of Hillcrest Academy.
- **Is it possible for more grassroots, entrepreneurial, community organizations to become involved with Hillcrest?** Absolutely. We definitely heard many voices at the listening session tell us it's important to connect with local organizations that know our kids and our neighborhoods. As an RFP requirement, we will include collaborating with grassroots, local providers focused on empowering and uplifting kids.
- **How will the Court help ROP employees who lost jobs land on their feet?** The Court is acutely aware of the difficult position ROP employees have been put in. There are many job openings with HCJC and the County and we encourage displaced ROP workers to apply. For the next two weeks, ROP employees who apply for jobs with Hamilton County Juvenile Court are being prioritized. We cannot guarantee hiring, but we will give your application priority. Visit [our website](#) to view all current job openings.
- **Can the importance of cultural competency be included in the RFP?** The Court recognizes the importance of cultural competency and as a government entity gives it priority as we make decisions on behalf of a diverse public. We heard that message at the listening session and will include cultural competency as an RFP requirement for new Hillcrest management.
- **How can we have a conversation about change if children are not at the table? They are the ones most affected, need to be represented and included in the conversation.** While it is important that we respect the privacy and confidentiality of the children and families we serve, this is a very important observation that we will explore, particularly with our Probation Department. We're committed to giving children who have been through the juvenile justice system a voice and a seat at the table.

- **Will we hold another public meeting?** Because we are working on a tight timeline this is the only public meeting related to the Hillcrest RFP process, however we will provide regular updates on the RFP process on our website. That being said, if you have a question or comment about Hillcrest, or anything else related to the Court, you can email Hillcrestfeedback@juvcourt.hamilton-co.org. We might not respond to each message but we will read them all.