

Statement from Kurn Hattin Homes – 9/19/2020

Various media outlets have reported that Kurn Hattin Homes was pressured by the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) to close its license as a residential treatment program (RTP). This is not accurate. Further, many of the facts and conclusions drawn by the media are demonstrably false.

Kurn Hattin Homes, on its own initiative, elected to close its RTP license because it is a residential educational program and not a residential treatment program. The closure of its RTP license does not, in any way, impact the Homes' operations or mission. Just like we have been for more than 125 years, Kurn Hattin is open and will continue to operate an outstanding residential school for children ages 5-15 whose families are experiencing a period of need or instability.

It is patently false to report that Kurn Hattin was pressured by DCF to surrender its license. It is also patently false to report that DCF has issued a "damning" report finding a "pervasive culture of abuse" that prompted this process. The closure of the license is entirely unrelated to any issues of alleged abuse, and DCF never stipulated any such finding.

The documented sequence of events and communications with DCF is below. While it may be that DCF was trying to tie up loose ends earlier this month, we cannot explain why DCF sent us reports more than a year late, delivered completely contradictory findings within days of each other, and faulted Kurn Hattin for incidents after it had already determined the investigations did not support the allegations. Its mishandling of our issues and its apparent release to the media of confidential information about children are beyond disappointing.

We told DCF more than a year ago that we chose to end our license with DCF because we are not a residential treatment program. We provide children with a year-round home and school; we don't provide treatment. As a school, we are approved by the Agency of Education and are members of the Vermont Independent School Association and have been for years. We have worked extremely hard over the past few years to make improvements and provide the best quality life for the children in our care.

When Kurn Hattin has been notified of an allegation or issue with one of its children, it has reported it, responded to the appropriate agency, and taken corrective action. Over the past few months, we also have been trying to understand what happened in the past. An independent investigator is reviewing allegations of abuse at Kurn Hattin Homes in the 1960s - 1980s, which were asserted this summer. Given that the alleged incidents occurred as much as 60 years ago, it is taking some time. Just know that we take any allegation very seriously, and we will do whatever is necessary to reach the truth.

Chronology of Events:

April 2019: Kurn Hattin reported to DCF about claims of peer-on-peer abuse (regarding boys and girls), and DCF investigated them.

August 2019: Regarding the conduct of the boys months before, DCF prepared a report and found that, while “the sexualized activities described by the boys in ‘the club’ are largely developmentally normative...,” DCF faulted Kurn Hattin for its employees’ lack of supervision in allowing the conduct to go on longer than it should have. (Kurn Hattin was notified of these findings on September 9, 2019.) By the time the report was received, Kurn Hattin Homes had already taken significant corrective action and had started the process to hire a new residential director.

September 2019: With respect to the RTP license, following up on conversations with DCF that had been ongoing for several years, Kurn Hattin Homes notified DCF that it wanted to be released from its license because Kurn Hattin does not function as a residential treatment program. DCF informed Kurn Hattin that this process would require a review and issuance of a License Report from DCF. (That Report, which was dated December 2019, identified certain regulatory deficiencies. The Report, however, was not provided to Kurn Hattin until July 22, 2020.)

June 25, 2020: DCF wrote to Kurn Hattin Homes acknowledging Kurn Hattin’s “interest” in closing its license. DCF said it was “willing to close your RTP license as of July 15, 2020” upon confirmation that Kurn Hattin had notified several organizations that it is no longer licensed as an RTP and that Kurn Hattin agreed to only accept students whose needs can be met within its residential education program. Contrary to assertions in the media, there was never any pressure for Kurn Hattin Homes to relinquish the license. In fact, in the same June 25, 2020 letter, DCF offered to assist Kurn Hattin in meeting regulatory requirements to remain licensed as an RTP if it so desired. Kurn Hattin declined the offer.

July 15, 2020: Kurn Hattin Homes had completed all applicable requirements to close its license and assumed it had been closed, per DCF’s correspondence in June.

July 22, 2020: Kurn Hattin Homes wrote to DCF affirming that the requirements for closure of its license had been met and, as far as Kurn Hattin was concerned, the matter was concluded. On July 22, in response to that letter, Kurn Hattin received the License Report (but it was dated December 2019). In the License Report, DCF cited Kurn Hattin’s noncompliance in 14 regulations out of 202 (a 93% compliance rate), but by the time Kurn Hattin actually received the License Report, seven months after it was written, Kurn Hattin was already in compliance with all applicable regulations.

July 31, 2020: After receiving the License Report on July 22, Kurn Hattin Homes also then received two letters from DCF regarding two of the girls' incidents (apparently cited in recent media reports) that Kurn Hattin had reported to DCF in April 2019, over a year earlier. The DCF letters stated that the allegations were unfounded, citing "not enough information exists to support the allegations," and DCF nullified the initial incident reports.

August 4, 2020: Kurn Hattin Homes wrote back to DCF to address the License Report findings point by point and to express its surprise at the fact that it was receiving for the first time the License Report, which was seven months late, and the reports from the April 2019 investigation, which were more than a year late.

September 1, 2020: Kurn Hattin Homes received yet more correspondence from DCF regarding the incidents it investigated in early 2019, including two incidents that had happened several years prior. In these new letters, DCF stated it had found deficiencies on the part of Kurn Hattin. However, approximately one month before, DCF had told Kurn Hattin the exact opposite regarding two of those claims, saying that there was not sufficient evidence to support the allegations.

September 3, 2020: Kurn Hattin Homes again wrote to DCF to express its dismay at receiving these letters regarding the April 2019 incidents, now over a year later, and after DCF had already cleared Kurn Hattin for meeting all of the requirements to close out its license.

September 4, 2020: Inexplicably, DCF sent yet another letter to Kurn Hattin Homes concluding that one of the incidents investigated in April 2019 (again apparently cited in the recent media report) did not have sufficient evidence to support the allegations.

September 10, 2020: DCF sent Kurn Hattin Homes a letter acknowledging that it has satisfied the requirements for closing out its RTP license (which Kurn Hattin had affirmed in July) and formally closed the RTP license.