

School for troubled teens is under review after fight draws police; suspected ring leaders charged with felonies

SOMERS — State officials will investigate Lincoln Hall in the aftermath of a 30-student riot that broke out last week at the residential school for troubled boys.

The state's Office of Children and Family Services, which licenses Lincoln Hall, on Monday said it is conducting a "thorough review" of the school's operations, including its student-to-staff ratio and discipline procedures, and will meet with administrators to discuss ways to prevent further violence.

"We are aware of and concerned about recent incidents on campus," said OCFS spokeswoman Susan Steele.

The announcement came as four Lincoln Hall residents, accused of instigating Friday's riot that injured several employees, were granted residence at another youth center during an appearance Monday in Town Court.

David Excourse, 17, Cleveland Fowler, 16, Sergio Naranjo, 16, and Shakiem Way, 17, were charged over the weekend with first-degree riot, a felony, and are being held in county jail on \$10,000 bail. They will be moved to a youth center in Mount Vernon if room is available, and are due back in court Jan. 10.

Andrew Hamilton, 16, of Brooklyn also appeared yesterday on a separate assault charge after, police said, he brutally beat a fellow student in November. Hamilton, who allegedly injured a teacher who was trying to break up the fight, may also be transferred to the Mount Vernon center.

Police have seen assaults and runaways spike at Lincoln Hall this year, a trend that local officials worry is a sign the school is losing its ability to control bad behavior.

On Friday, students hurled rocks and two employees were taken to the hospital after trying to quell fights that broke out in the cafeteria. Nearly a dozen police officers responded with a K-9 unit and air support

to ensure students didn't flee the low-security campus. It took an hour for staff and police to control the fight, authorities said.

"We have gone for years without much of a problem, but now it's become a regular occurrence — and it's using police resources," Town Supervisor Mary Beth Murphy said Monday.

Jack Flavin, the school's executive director, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Patrick Bosley, a senior investigator, said police responded to an estimated 50 student-runaway calls this year, a spike from previous years when there were no more than a dozen.

"That's one of our biggest concerns," Bosley said. "The school has had a lot more runaways, sometimes on a weekly basis."

There has also been a troubling rise in violent crimes, mostly student-on-student assaults, in the past 18 months, Bosley said.

State police take the lead in responding to violent incidents at the school, help town police find missing students and investigate lesser crimes like burglaries.

Town officials plan to meet with Lincoln Hall administrators early next week to discuss the surge in violence.

Lincoln Hall is licensed to serve 252 youths and has a proposal under review with OCFS that would

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reduce its licensed capacity by 72 beds.

Populations in juvenile facilities continue to decline statewide as family courts place only those juveniles with serious and intensive needs, Steele said.

Somers Police Chief Michael Driscoll said the recent violence at Lincoln Hall might stem from the school's changing clientele.

"They're getting a lot harder criminals," he said, adding that the current security measures do not do enough to keep students from running away. "You can come and go almost as you please."

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