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Steep rise in police calls to Schenectady facility for troubled teens

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SCHENECTADY— City Councilman **Vince Riggi** wants to know what's behind the precipitous rise in calls for service over the past two years at the Northeast Parent & Child Society, a residential home for troubled youngsters on Park Avenue.

"There's a cost associated with this. Yes, we have to provide the service, but do they have their facility under control?" Riggi said Wednesday. "My concern is if they can't control their residents, then that's a problem for the city of Schenectady, and then it becomes a taxpayer problem."

Riggi requested an analysis of the call volume from the city police department, which revealed the upward trend of police and emergency calls to the facility after a neighbor who lives near Northeast brought the matter to his attention.

There were 406 calls through July 14 of this year. For the same period in 2016, the number of calls was 427. It's not clear if every call required a police visit to the facility.

The website for **Northern Rivers**, the parent organization for the Northeast Parent & Child Society, states it is "committed to helping children, adults, and families."

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In a prepared statement, Northern Rivers CEO **William T. Gettman** said child-welfare employees "receive intensive, specialized training to address the challenges of youths placed with us in residential care." He said there is a 1-to-5 ratio of staff to residents, typically ages 12 to 18.

"Nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of those in our care," Gettman said. "In the course of their treatment, our residents may experience issues that by both regulation and best practice require that police, fire and emergency medical professionals provide outside assistance."

Gettman said administrators "monitor trends, explore causes of behaviors and train our staff to minimize the impact of issues that are not beyond our control," and staffing ratios are mandated by the state Office of Children and **Family Services**, the regulatory body that licenses this facility.

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"We work closely with local authorities to reduce the number of calls for intervention and with officials in Schenectady to further refine our efforts every day," Gettman said.

Residents are placed in the nonsecure facility by the court system because "they face challenges that require intensive treatment in a residential setting."

Though the residents are not locked in, they cannot come and go as they please, Gettman said.

The police analysis indicates that the department was called 135 times in 2014 through July 15. The next year during that period the number rose to 227. With the

exception of 2014, "get a report" and "juvenile incidents" accounted for the vast majority of calls that brought police to the facility.

Assistant Chief **Jack Falvo** explained that classification, which is generated by police dispatch system, is a catch-all phrase that could encompass "several different type of offenses" such as a runaway juvenile or a rules violation.

Besides the cost associated with the police response, Riggi expressed concern about the potential adverse effect on the quality of life for people who live near the Park Avenue facility.

He plans to ask for the matter to be placed on the City Council committee agenda for the Aug. 7. meeting and hopes to have police officials present then.

Falvo said police met a few months with management at the facility to discuss thefts, mostly of cars in Schenectady and elsewhere, allegedly involving a few residents at Northeast. He said a follow-up meeting will be scheduled to discuss the jump in call volume and other matters.

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