



Pol calls on Romney to tackle DYS' deadly crisis

A key lawmaker is calling for action to solve a growing crisis within the state's juvenile justice system.

By Kevin Rothstein
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Sparked by a Herald series this week, state Sen. Susan C. Tucker (D-Andover) said yesterday she wants to hold a high-level sit-down "as soon as possible" with officials from the administration of Gov. Mitt Romney [related, bio].

"I will be meeting with the (DYS) commissioner and the (Executive Office of Health and Human Services) secretary on your series to see how the Legislature and administration can cooperate," she told the Herald.

The series outlined how the Department of Youth Services has failed to adequately care for the growing number of mentally ill and otherwise troubled kids sent to its lockup for minor crimes.

The crisis was highlighted by the recent suicides of two Boston youths in DYS lockup - 15-year-old Myron Watkins and 17-year-old Charish Williams - and 94 attempted suicides over two years.

Tucker, Senate chairwoman of the joint committee on Human Services and Elderly Affairs, wants the Romney administration to explore how other states handle similar problems.

Tucker praised the administration for not "trying to sweep this under the rug," and said she wants to learn more about the governor's plan to boost services for girls. But she lamented reform did not come sooner. "Unfortunately, too often in the human service system it is tragedies that set off action," she said.