

Momentum grows against alternative jail: [A Edition]

Brisgone, Gina; Courant Staff Writer

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By GINA BRISGONE
Courant Staff Writer

MIDDLETOWN — City officials and state legislators have joined a local citizens' group in a lawsuit to block an alternative incarceration program at Connecticut Valley Hospital, officials said Monday.

"We have all the major players signing on," said Ralph Wilson, attorney for Residents Against Institutional Dumping, or Raid.

Wilson and the city's legal staff have researched and compiled a lawsuit seeking a court order blocking the program planned for Dutton Hall on Connecticut Valley Hospital grounds. It will be filed Friday at Superior Court in Middletown, Wilson said. Among those to be named

as plaintiffs in the lawsuit are members of Raid; Mayor Sebastian J. Garafalo; and state Sen. Edward W. Munster, R-Haddam.

The group also is seeking to add the names of state Sen. Amelia P. Mustone, D-Meriden; state Rep. Vincent J. Loffredo, D-Middletown; and State Rep. James A. O'Rourke III, D-Cromwell.

Mustone said Tuesday she is waiting to receive a copy of the lawsuit before adding her name to it. Loffredo and O'Rourke could not be reached for comment.

The lawsuit follows a tumultuous two weeks of debate among city officials, residents, state mental health officials and the governor's office over an escape by a confessed killer from Connecticut Valley Hospital, a

state psychiatric hospital.

Local residents and officials had hoped the Aug. 26 incident would force state officials to back off the plan, made public in June, to keep 16- to 21-year-old convicts on hospital property.

Last Thursday, Stanley A. Twardy, chief of staff for Gov. Lowell P. Weicker Jr., promised Garafalo that the governor would enforce tighter security measures at the hospital, but said the state had no intention to back off plans for the alternative incarceration program.

The group's intended lawsuit contends, among other issues, that the state failed to follow its own regulations on transferring use of its property when it failed to notify all the officials listed in the lawsuit.

It also contends that the legislators whose districts are affected by the decision should have been given an opportunity to debate the issue in committees of the legislature.

It also will contend that the state erred by allowing Mental Health Commissioner Albert J. Solnit to sign a lease with the judicial department. The group contends that the property must be put on a list of vacant state property before it is turned over to another state agency, Wilson said.

Raid had been pursuing a lawsuit on its own until last month, when the city's common council joined the effort. Garafalo says the council authorized him to "take whatever action to prevent it from coming."