

April 14, 2026

Sean Thomas Conroe, Executive Director  
Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors  
PO Box 200804  
Helena, MT 59620-0804

**RE: Response to Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors Site Review**

Dear Mr. Conroe and Members of the Board:

On behalf of AWARE, Inc., I want to express our sincere gratitude for the comprehensive and thoughtful site review conducted at our Therapeutic Youth Group Homes in Anaconda on February 3rd and 4th, 2026. We deeply appreciate the Board's time, expertise, and the collaborative spirit demonstrated throughout the inspection process.

We are honored by the Board's recognition of our staff's dedication and our trauma-informed approach to care. The commendation of our direct care workers and the acknowledgment of our integration of mental health care with education are particularly meaningful to our team. These observations affirm our commitment to our mission: "We help people live independent lives."

As a CARF-accredited organization serving diverse populations across Montana, we take the Board's recommendations seriously and view them as valuable opportunities for continuous quality improvement. Please find below our response to each recommendation:

**Response to Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Prepare an appropriate child poster of clients' rights and display them conspicuously in the physical group homes.

**AWARE Response:**

We accept this recommendation and will implement it immediately. Our Quality Improvement Team, in collaboration with our clinical staff and youth advisors, will develop appropriate visual materials presenting patient rights in accessible, youth-friendly language. We will create versions appropriate for different developmental levels and ensure they incorporate visual elements that engage our younger residents. These posters will be displayed in common areas of each group home, including day rooms, dining areas, and near telephones. Target completion date is 60 days from today. We will also incorporate review of these visual materials into our admission process and regular community meetings with residents.

**Recommendation 2:** If absent, actively reference Section 53-21-107 MCA in rights and responsibilities documentation to reinforce the superior nature of the topic, that these are rights by law.

**AWARE Response:** We accept this recommendation fully. We will immediately revise our intake packets, client handbooks, and rights documentation to explicitly reference Section 53-21-107 MCA.

This statutory reference will be prominently featured to emphasize that these rights are legally protected, not merely organizational policies. Our legal and compliance team will review all relevant documentation to ensure consistent citation of this statute. Additionally, we will train all intake and clinical staff to verbally reference this legal foundation when reviewing rights with youth and families. Target completion date: [45 days from response date]. Revised materials will be submitted to the Board for review upon completion.

**Recommendation 3:** Post contact information for Disability Rights Montana, Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors, and OIG Licensing in the physical group homes. Also, provide this information to parents as a part of the intake process.

**AWARE Response:** We enthusiastically accept this recommendation and recognize this as a critical oversight. We will immediately:

- Create conspicuous postings near all resident-accessible telephones in each group home with contact information for Disability Rights Montana, the Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors, and OIG Licensing
- Revise our intake packets to include this information with clear explanations of each organization's role in advocacy and oversight
- Develop a resource card that residents can keep with this information
- Include discussion of these advocacy resources in our admission orientation process

As a CARF-accredited organization, we are committed to ensuring that the individuals we serve have full access to external advocacy and oversight bodies. Target completion date is 30 days from this response.

**Recommendation 4:** Explore the possibility of allowing residents to complete grievances independently through paper documentation, in privacy if desired.

**AWARE Response:** We accept this recommendation and appreciate the Board's attention to accessibility and resident comfort. While our digital grievance system has served us well, we recognize that it may create barriers for some residents or may not align with individual preferences for privacy and communication style. We will:

- Immediately implement a parallel paper-based grievance process available to all residents
- Ensure paper grievance forms are accessible in private locations within each group home
- Provide locked drop boxes for confidential submission
- Train all staff on supporting residents in whichever grievance method they prefer, without influence or bias
- Maintain our digital option for those who prefer it
- Ensure both systems route to the same review process with identical timelines and procedures

Target completion date is 30 days from this response. We will monitor utilization of both systems to ensure accessibility and will seek resident feedback on their preferences.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Leighann Fogerty Knight*

Leighann Fogerty Knight – Chief Operations Officer

AWARE

205 E. Park Avenue

Anaconda, Montana 59711

406-563-8117, extension 1019

[lknight@aware-inc.org](mailto:lknight@aware-inc.org)

cc: Jen Wihlborg – AWARE Senior Services Director

cc: Matt Bugni – AWARE Chief Executive Officer