

CCHR: 94% of States Fail Troubled Youth Protections in Behavioral Centers

Group acknowledges media as inadvertent watchdogs that can influence legislators to enact protections against abuse of teens in psychiatric facilities

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Children and adolescents continue to suffer the consequences of poorly run and abusive psychiatric and behavioral centers and hospitals, despite a year of massive exposure of restraint deaths, resident sexual assaults and other abuse, according to mental health industry watchdog, Citizens Commission on Human Rights International (CCHR). The group issued a scathing criticism that “troubled youths” are still at risk. Several states—Utah, Oregon and Michigan—are acting to protect children but that leaves 94% of the states potentially leaving “troubled youths” in danger.

Taxpayer dollars expended through Medicaid and Medicare used on treatment in these facilities require close monitoring, it says.

CCHR acknowledged media that have kept this issue in the limelight, pointing out that they inadvertently become the watchdog or monitor that mental health agencies are failing at, but which forces them to take action. Nearly a year ago, 16-year-old Cornelius Frederick, an African American foster care youth, lay unconscious on the floor of the cafeteria at Lakeside Academy, a residential treatment center for at-risk youth in Kalamazoo, Michigan and owned by Sequel Youth and Family Services.

After he threw a sandwich on the floor, seven male staff members held him on the floor for more than 10 minutes, putting weight on his legs and torso, while he gasped for air, saying: “I



Group acknowledges media as inadvertent watchdogs that can influence legislators to enact protections against increasing incidents of sexual and restraint abuse of teens in psychiatric facilities funded by taxpayer dollars.

can't breathe." Cornelius died two days later. As NBC News reported, "The fatal restraint ultimately led to a re-evaluation of the care children receive in these facilities in Michigan and increased scrutiny of the for-profit behavioral health company that ran Lakeside." [1]

Michigan now plans to ban restraint use in youth facilities in all but the most extreme circumstances. [2] Utah recently amended their law to do the same. [3]

NBC recently ran a one-hour show, "Children That Pay" that addressed Sequel Youth and Family Services' operations and abuses in Alabama. The facilities were paid \$28 million through Medicaid in the last three years and government contracts worth \$68 million since 2016. [3]

CCHR says that every week, there is exposure of abuses in both for-profit and non-profit psychiatric centers and Medicaid and Medicare dollars are being wasted on abuse, not treatment.

Recently, a chain of youth centers drew CCHR's attention when APM Reports reported that 17 former residents of KidsPeace Mesabi Academy in Minnesota had received approximately \$500,000 in a settlement over allegations of abuse. [4]

APM Reports' series of stories in 2016 had highlighted problems at the now closed facility where it found alleged abuse, institutional neglect, and a lack of government oversight. [5]

CCHR has audited KidsPeace behavioral centers under its sights since the early 1990s. In 1993, it documented a restraint death of a 12-year-old boy, who like Cornelius Frederick, pleaded that he could not breathe when a 215-pound counselor sat on the boy's back pinning him down for 27 minutes. "Jason" never regained consciousness and died the next day. The boy had only been at the center for less than a day, created a disturbance and was restrained after he threatened to run away. An autopsy stated the cause of death was caused by "a torso compressed during prolonged period of restraint." [6]

Five years later, another teen, aged 14, died from "compression asphyxia" in a facility when he was physically restrained by counselors. [7] In another case in 2000, a 10-year-old boy was allegedly assaulted by an older resident, which was passed off as "consensual." [8]

In 2002, a 16-year-old girl was sent to one of the company's behavioral facilities and six weeks later was dead from suicide, according to Newsday. [9] Three years later, a teenage girl was raped by a counselor who pled guilty to institutional rape in 2006. [10] In 2018, the scandal of migrant children being housed in psychiatric centers included KidsPeace. There were questions then on why they were sent there, when there had been allegations that residents had been sexually abused. [11]

Since 2015, CCHR has brought incidents of youth psychiatric abuse, especially restraint deaths and sexual assault in behavioral facilities to the attention of all state legislators several times

over. "Time and time again, legislators have spoken about this but this needs to translate into nationwide legislative protections," CCHR says.

CCHR has worked for more than 50 years to achieve more than 190 laws that protect against psychiatric abuse, which a United Nations Special Rapporteur acknowledged. But it says there is a dire need for health agencies to step up to the plate now because Federal regulations were put in place to restrict restraint use over 20 years ago, and yet today we see an egregious escalation of the same child abuse in the mental health system.

Report psychiatric abuses to CCHR.

[1] Hannah Rappleye, "Michigan to ban restraints in youth facilities after Cornelius Frederick's death," NBC News, 2 Apr. 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/michigan-ban-restraints-youth-facilities-after-cornelius-frederick-s-death-n1262756>

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Alabama Sequel facilities spotlighted in critical NBC report," AL.com, 2 Apr. 2021, <https://www.al.com/news/2021/04/alabama-sequel-facilities-spotlighted-in-critical-nbc-report.html>

[4] "Former residents of troubled youth facility receive settlement money," APM Reports, 2 Apr. 2021, <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2021/04/02/former-residents-mesabi-academy-youth-facility-receive-settlement-money>

[5] Ibid.

[6] Debbie Garlicki, "KidsPeace Death Will Go To A Jury, Judge Decides," Morning Call (Allentown, PA), 25 May 1995; "Counselor Charged in Suffocation," The Legal Intelligencer, 19 Nov. 1993; "KidsPeace Reaches Settlement In 1993 Death of Restrained Boy...", Morning Call (Allentown, PA), 22 May 1996; <https://autismmemorial.wordpress.com/1993/05/13/jason-tallman/>

[7] Dave Reynolds, "Mom Settles With Facility Over Son's Restraint Death," MN Department of Administration, 3 Aug. 2006, <https://mn.gov/mnddc//news/inclusion-daily/2006/08/080306painstabuse.htm>

[8] Correspondence from Law Offices of Erik H. Langeland, P.C. January 12, 2004 and correspondence from KidsPeace Legal Affairs Kathryn Wohlsen Mayer January 12, 2004

[9] Lauren Terrazzano, Troubled Kids, Far From Home, Probing care, oversight at treatment centers, Newsday, 22 Sept. 2002, <https://www.bridges4kids.org/articles/2002/10-02/Newsday9-22-02.html>

[10] "Teenager Files \$10 Million Personal Injury Lawsuit Against Washington DC For Rape in Clinic," Lebowitz & Mzhen law firm, 19 June 2008,

https://www.washingtondcinyrlylawyerblog.com/teenager_files_10_million_pers/

[11] Aura Bogado, et al., "Migrant children coming to the US are being sent to shelters with histories of child abuse allegations," The World, 20 June 2018, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-06-20/migrant-children-coming-us-are-being-sent-shelters-histories-child-abuse>

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