



Community Alliance for the Ethical Treatment of Youth

April 26, 2008
Rep. George Miller, Chairman
U.S. House Education & Labor Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

On behalf of our supporter members, I am writing in support of the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act (H.R. 5876). The Community Alliance for the Ethical Treatment of Youth (CAFETY), is an advocacy organization dedicated to ending the inhumane treatment of youth in residential care. We are made up primarily of formerly institutionalized youth and are outraged that these abuses continue to occur. We believe that it is the government's responsibility to protect the basic human rights of youth to being treated with dignity and respect. Youth are not offered care that meets basic recognized standards such as being offered care in the least restrictive environment, appropriate mental health treatment, appropriate education in residential facilities, unrestricted contact with parents, freedom of thought, opinion, non-censorship and association, and ultimately freedom from torture and risk of death..

On Thursday, April 24, 2008, hearings were held on the issue of abuse and torture of youth in residential programs and revealed what we have known all along – that abuse and torture, often in the name of treatment, is occurring. This bill is designed to protect youth from disciplinary techniques that we have experienced, which involve withholding food, water, clothing, shelter or medical care, physical and mechanical restraints that are inconsistent with the well-being of the child, acts of physical or mental abuse designed to humiliate, degrade, or undermine a child's self-respect. Also, the bill provides for reasonable access to a telephone, the training of staff members as to the definitions of child abuse and how to report it, disclosure of staff qualifications and criminal; background checks for such staff, policies and procedures for emergency medical care and parental notification of changes in care, and notification of parents of violations of applicable laws and licensing standard. This is welcome change that cannot

come soon enough for those who have lived through these egregious violations of our human rights.

For us survivors, those presently imprisoned and, most of all, for those youth killed at the hands of this industry, there is no justice to be found. It is not too late, however, for future generations of youth struggling with behavioral, emotional and mental health issues. Youth that face such challenges are entitled to legitimate care and to be protected from harm. Such youth are not simply liars and manipulators; they are, as we were, human beings struggling in need of support and to be heard and understood. Such youth need not be further traumatized by being kidnapped in the middle of the night, silenced through censorship and broken down by indefinite imprisonment and by being subjected to punitive and aversive practices. Surely as a nation we have moved beyond such antiquated thinking as 'youth are to be seen and not heard'.

Certainly, it is clear, that some facilities exist that do not advocate such practices. This rogue industry can learn from such exemplary facilities such as the one we heard about called the Walker School – which only accepts students from their state, whereby parents have open access to the campus and aversive, punitive practices are not used. We hope that this bill and continual dissemination of information will help educate parents on these vital differences – the difference between facilities that demonstrate respect for the youth they serve and their families and those that base their practices on fear – the fear of desperate parents for the well being of youth, the fear society has of youth, particularly 'out of control' youth, and that in turn use fear to induce change (as opposed to growth) in the youth they claim to treat.

We applaud you again for your efforts and leadership in taking the needs of youth seriously and the introduction of legislation to that end. In closing, we would like to offer our assistance in the passing of this bill. Please contact Brian Lombrowski, M.P.P., President of CAFETY at brian@cafety.org if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Brian Lombrowski , M.P.P., President
ASTART Member

Kathryn Whitehead, Executive Director
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