



April 28, 2008

The Honorable George Miller
Chair, Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D. C., 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of Voices for America's Children (*Voices*), and child advocates across the country, I extend our endorsement to the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act (H.R. 5876). This legislation is a much needed addition implementing a new set of governance and oversight of residential treatment facilities currently operating without any accountability, and are a dangerous threat to the children and youth who attend them.

Voices is a national, nonpartisan child advocacy organization strengthening and integrating the work of our 60 multi-issue members in 46 states, as well as the District of Columbia and the United States Virgin Islands. *Voices'* member organizations advocate for effective public policies that will improve the lives of all children in their communities and states. *Voices* works on behalf of all children and families, with a specific focus on vulnerable populations. *Voices'* vision for safety calls for all children to be safe in their homes and communities from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, avoid risky behaviors, and contribute to the community well-being. This vision requires a comprehensive approach, one that is equally focused on prevention and early intervention activities for children and families; high quality intervention based services when children are at risk; and a full community based aftercare approach when children reenter their community. This vision also includes protecting children when they must enter out-of-home care. *Voices* believes that your legislation is a strong step forward in achieving this goal.

Your legislation addresses a crisis documented in now two Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports detailing thousands of allegations of abuse—including some leading to death—occurring in residential treatment facilities operating under the guise of wilderness or “boot camps.” Residential treatment facilities should be a viable option to assist children who are facing extreme behavioral problems, including substance abuse and mental illness. These options

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should only be pursued with the assurance of quality treatment of services provided, and that their child will remain safe and free from harm.

Specifically, your legislation establishes operating standards for such facilities ensuring that child safety is paramount; maintains an appropriately trained workforce; ensures the use of best practices at the facilities; establishes essential oversight and monitoring procedures and establishes a public website to provide information about programs and their compliance with these requirements for parents and to the public.

Voices applauds your dedication to improving the lives of children and we look forward to working with you to move this legislation towards enactment.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William H. Bentley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

William H. Bentley
President and Chief Executive Officer