



May 20, 2008

The Honorable George Miller  
Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Children's Defense Fund

Dear Chairman Miller:

The Children's Defense Fund applauds your decades of leadership on behalf of vulnerable children across our country. The Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2008, H.R. 5876, is another critically important step in ensuring that no young person is subjected to abuse and neglect under the guise of treatment. We strongly support the legislation and commend you and the Committee on Education and Labor for moving it forward.

H.R. 5876 responds directly and forcefully to the physical and psychological abuse and neglect and death of youth in private residential treatment facilities, including therapeutic boarding schools, wilderness camps, boot camps, and behavior modification facilities, as reported by the Government Accountability Office. These tragic abuses were described poignantly by the teens' parents and by youth at the Committee's hearings. The bill requires the Department of Health and Human Services to establish minimum standards of care for these children and also helps to ensure that staff respond appropriately when abuse or neglect occurs, and that parents are notified when their children's treatment changes or abuses occur in the facilities.

This bill also will expand our knowledge about these facilities, enhance the quality of care they provide, and impose accountability for the care of children. It requires states over time to establish protection and oversight for the care of these children that will build on what is learned at the federal level. It is an outrage that such abuses have been allowed to go unchecked for so long, and that already vulnerable youth and their families have been left out without adequate accountability for the care provided.

The Children's Defense Fund looks forward to working with you and others in the Congress to see these essential protections for children and youth enacted this year.

Sincerely yours,

Marian Wright Edelman

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