

February 11, 2009

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) is pleased to support H.R. 911 the “Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009.” Your legislation is a needed response to the cases of child abuse and neglect, some even resulting in death, investigated by Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems around the country and similarly documented cases investigated by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

AUCD is a membership organization that supports and promotes a national network of university-based interdisciplinary programs devoted to advancing policy and practice for and with individuals with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and communities.

AUCD is committed to preventing the abuse and maltreatment of children in residential programs. Our University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities strive to inform parents, educators and professionals about the threats of child abuse and maltreatment as well as to offer options designed to support individuals and families who have suffered abuse and maltreatment and as a result have acquired a developmental disability. AUCD also creates awareness of this issue through collaborative workgroups with other disability organizations and to educate professionals who work with or come into contact with children who have been maltreated.

Programs designed to offer treatment for mental health or substance abuse must use quality programs grounded in best-practices that ensure the safety of children. Families often have to make extremely difficult choices when seeking placements for children with these types of needs. Unfortunately, a number of the programs your legislation seeks to regulate flourish because parents lack even the most basic information, including whether their children will be treated humanely.

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A study prompted by the Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1988 determined that the incidence of maltreatment among children with disabilities was 1.7 times higher than the incidence among children without disabilities. Also, it was determined that the incidence of disabilities that were caused or were likely to have been caused by maltreatment was 147 per 1,000 maltreated children. This legislation could help prevent the maltreatment of children with disabilities as well as reducing the risk of children developing disabilities as a result of abuse.

The "Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009" addresses this issue in a straightforward and thoughtful manner. The bill recognizes, and balances properly, the important role both the federal and state governments can play in protecting children from abuse and neglect at the hands of some residential programs. Additionally, H. R. 911 will provide families with the critical information necessary to make an informed decision on this important matter.

AUCD commends you for your hard work on this legislation as well as your lifetime of attention to this issue. We look forward to working with you to get this critical legislation enacted into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George Jesum".

Executive Director