



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

February 10, 2009

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

Dear Chairman Miller:

On behalf of the 148,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing in support of the *Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009* (H.R. 911), legislation requiring much-needed standards and enforcement provisions to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect at certain residential treatment facilities. We commend you for your commitment and leadership efforts in addressing this important issue.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprising researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and graduate students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, a profession, and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

As you know, an October 2007 Government Accountability Office report entitled *Residential Treatment Program: Concerns Regarding Abuse and Death in Certain Programs for Troubled Youth* found thousands of allegations of abuse, including abuse leading to death, at residential treatment programs in the United States and in American-owned and operated facilities abroad between the years 1990 and 2007. While the reports of deficient services at unregulated residential programs alone are alarming, there have been publicized accounts of physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

It has been documented that once they have entered these programs, children are often prohibited from speaking with family members for up to six months, a practice shown to have considerably harmful clinical outcomes for children. In addition, large numbers of unqualified staff implement and administer treatment plans and supervision. Moreover, the educational services provided in these sometimes called "therapeutic boarding schools" often fail to meet even minimum standards.

Furthermore, restraint procedures are often significantly more restrictive than what is generally accepted by mental health licensing standards. In addition, there have been many documented cases of unnecessary seclusion of children in isolation rooms for hours a day, and sometimes for weeks at a time. Neglect has been reported as well, in terms of safety, cleanliness, nutrition, and medical care. APA applauds your commitment to address these appalling circumstances.

The *Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009* lays a strong foundation for necessary change by monitoring the care of children in these residential facilities. In particular, APA appreciates the legislation's inclusion of provisions to disseminate information about programs and to ensure program compliance.

These provisions include a public-access website with information for parents and others about individual programs and their compliance with the requirements; a national toll-free hotline to receive complaints of child abuse and neglect at covered programs; mandatory telephone access for each child at a covered program; the establishment of minimum standards to be met by covered programs to ensure the safety of children in their care, including prohibitions on techniques or practices that involve withholding of essential food, clothing, shelter, or medical care necessary to maintain physical and mental health, and general safety; and unannounced site inspections and on-going reviews of compliance.

We also commend the provision of mandatory annual reporting by States to include the name and location of all covered programs operating in each State and a random sample of review of cases reporting child abuse and neglect investigated at covered programs to assess the appropriateness of decisions made in response to such reports.

In closing, I would like to thank you once again for your efforts in developing the *Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009* and to offer our association's assistance in furthering passage of this vital legislation that would ensure the safety and well being of all children. Please contact Annie Toro, J.D., M.P.H., of our Public Interest Government Relations Office at (202) 336-6068 or atoro@apa.org, if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. Keita".

Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Public Interest Directorate