

Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2008, H.R. 5876

Teens are at a transition point in their life. They aren't kids anymore and yet they aren't adults. The teen years are often a time of rebellion, experimentation and uncertainty. So what is a parent to do when their teen has severe behavioral or emotional challenges that create legal and financial problems for the whole family? Parents who have tried many therapeutic treatments without results are often at their wit's end and looking for any solution.

Earlier today I received a disturbing email from a friend whose niece has been locked away in a residential program for teens, where friends and family are not permitted to visit. These facilities use deceptive marketing practices to lure families of teens with emotional, behavioral and learning issues to commit teens to their programs for several years. Not surprisingly, these programs have become a multi-billion dollar industry where the children become victims. As these residential "treatment" programs are not strictly regulated, widespread reports of abuse and even death are common.

In October of 2007 a Congressional hearing took place to address the concerns about these programs. In April, two more reports documented the abuse and deceptive marketing practices that these facilities use. In May, Federal legislation was introduced called "Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2008", H.R. 5876 . Things look to be heading in the right direction to stop this abuse, however it is important that all parents are aware of the dangers of programs like these.

What would you do if your child were a teen with emotional, behavioral or learning problems? I look at my children now and in their moments of anger, I can see their pain. They need their family. They need to be loved. When they have problems, they need support. We live in a society where we cannot hold an adult against their will for more than 72 hours unless they are a danger to themselves or someone else. How is it acceptable that children are locked up for behavioral problems and not adults? Is there a solution?

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