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United State Senate Finance Committee Investigating Abuse in Youth Facilities

Little Rock, AR – Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) Managing Attorney Reagan Stanford will testify on Wednesday, June 12, 2024, during a United States Senate Finance Committee hearing on “Youth Residential Treatment Facilities: Examining Failures and Evaluating Solutions.” The hearing will take place at 10 am (eastern) and can be [viewed online here](#).

Over the past five years DRA has been monitoring and investigating the thirteen (13) psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTFs) in Arkansas. The investigations began after receiving complaints about a single PRTF. DRA’s investigation into those complaints revealed widespread concerns that included: repeated substantiated instances of staff abusing children, buildings in such disrepair they created safety hazards, a high rate of peer violence, lack of mental health treatment, a lack of activities and engagement, and inadequate educational services. The issues were so pervasive and so obvious that it was difficult to understand how this provider had been allowed to continue operating in this manner or why children were continuing to be placed there. As we expanded our monitoring to additional PRTFs we found similar issues at additional facilities throughout the state. Based on what the DRA investigators observed, what they were told by residents, and heard from staff, numerous investigations followed. What began as an investigation at a single facility grew into a sustained presence and interaction with all thirteen providers.

“DRA is proud that the U.S. Senate Finance Committee has called upon Ms. Stanford to share insight into what our investigations have come across in the thirteen facilities in Arkansas,” says Tom Masseau, Executive Director. “Ms. Stanford and her team have spent countless hours monitoring, talking with youth, reviewing records, and developing a database – designed to provide education to families – despite little to no activity from the current and previous Arkansas Administration, policymakers, and department officials. It is time for the members of the committee to see what is happening behind closed doors.”

Through DRA’s years of monitoring and investigating these facilities, we have seen firsthand how deeply flawed the overall residential treatment model is, the pervasive nature of abuse and neglect, and the low frequency and often low quality of services provided.

Examples of abuse and lack of treatment include:

- A staff member showed a child two videos of him and his girlfriend having oral and sexual intercourse.
- A staff member struck a child three times in the face with a closed fist leaving the child with bruising and redness on their face and bleeding from their ear.
- A staff member was seen pushing and kneeling a child in the groin area.
- Staff showing pornographic images to kids.
- Staff seen pulling client's shirt off, striking client with a fist, and both staff pull clients shirt over her head during a hold.
- Staff struck client three (3) times in the face with a closed fist.
- Staff observed on camera pushing and grabbing a resident into a room and on a bed.

DRA is working with others in our national network asking Congress to:

1. Increase investment in community-based services and concrete supports that can help prevent the use of congregate care.
2. Require meaningful outcome measures and discontinue payments for models that do not provide active treatment and individualized services, including residential treatment.
3. De-incentivize out-of-state placements.
4. Remedy the failures of oversight that exist at all levels.
5. Create an easy to access and navigate system that accurately identifies all youth residential treatment facilities and publishes surveys conducted by state survey agencies, quality of care, and incident data.
6. Invest in research and pilot programs to identify and validate effective treatment options.

Because every parent, guardian, and child deserve to have as much information as possible to make informed decisions about care before admission, we created a PRTF database. This database, organized by facility, makes all incidents reported to state licensing, all reports and surveys from oversight agencies, and all police reports for calls related to the facility available to the public. The database can be accessed at www.disabilityrightsar.org/prtf.

"It is time for everyone to take notice of how youth across Arkansas and the country are being subjected to abuse in these facilities," says Mr. Masseau. "No child entrusted into care should be subjected to the type of mistreatment carried out by adults. We are hopeful that after the hearing, members of Congress will take notice and kick open the door to expose the lack of treatment and services in PRTF's."

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Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) is the independent, private, nonprofit, nonpartisan Protection and Advocacy organization authorized by Federal and State law to protect and advocate for the civil and legal rights of people with disabilities in Arkansas.