

State of Texas
House of Representatives



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Representative Chuck Hopson
Chair, House Committee on General Investigating & Ethics
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Chairman Hopson:

This week, the Texas Tribune and Houston Chronicle reported on findings of abuse dating back to April of 2008 at the Daystar Residential, Inc. campus for developmentally disabled girls in the city of Manvel. Workers at the center allegedly "provoked seven developmentally disabled girls into a fight of biting and bruising, while they laughed, cheered and promised the winners a precious prize: after-school snacks".

While two employees were fired after this incident, there were no formal inquiries by the legislature into the actions of the employees and all records remain secret by the Department of Family and Protective Services.

The combined review by the Tribune and the Chronicle shows that this incident is merely one of more than 250 incidents of abuse and mistreatment in residential treatment centers around the state *in the last two years*. This has developed into a state-wide epidemic with serious emotional, physical and mental consequences for some of the most vulnerable citizens of Texas.

Children who are remanded to residential treatment centers are typically there because normal foster care environments are not adequately prepared to address the deep seeded emotional troubles from which they suffer and are generally not equipped to stage alcohol and drug addiction interventions.

In order to ensure that these children are properly taken care of at these centers which receive state funding (more than \$300 million since 2006), I would ask that the House

Committee on General Investigating & Ethics begin a formal investigation into the following:

1. All policies and procedures for the Department of Family and Protective Services relating to their internal investigations of residential treatment center.
2. All requirements for licensure of residential treatment centers, and the process by which a center is closed by the Department of Family and Protective Services.
3. All reporting requirements for the Department of Family and Protective Services and an explanation of the department's interaction with local and state law enforcement in incidents of abuse, neglect, or mistreatment in residential treatment centers.
4. All record retention policies for the Department of Family and Protective Services relating to records of abuse, neglect, or mistreatment in residential treatment centers.
5. All personnel and human resources screening procedures for the Department of Family and Protective Services for staff of residential treatment centers.
6. Any scientific evidence to show the root causes for staff of mentally, emotionally, and physically challenged residents to allow and initiate 'fight clubs'.
7. Evidence to show that additional precautions can be taken to prevent mistreatment in residential treatment centers, including but not limited to increased security/surveillance equipment, staff screening, and increased supervision by the Department of Family and Protective Services.

I look forward to addressing these issues during this Interim so that during the upcoming Session we can attempt to put an end to the horrific abuse of those who need treatment in our state.

Sincerely,



Pete P. Gallego

PPG/ac

cc:

Speaker Joe Straus

Members of the House Committee on General Investigating & Ethics

Anne Heiligenstein, Commissioner - Department of Family and Protective Services