



Autism National Committee, Inc.

21 years of working for civil rights and justice for people with autism
www.autcom.org

July 5, 2011

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member, Committee on Education and Labor
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act

Dear Congressman Miller:

The Autism National Committee strongly supports your bill, the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act. Thank you very much for your leadership and dedication to preventing abusive programs for all children.

The bill will ensure that children of all ages placed in residential programs are to be free from abuse and neglect. These facilities include any private or public residential program with a focus on serving children who have emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems or disorders; or alcohol or substance abuse problems. A number of children with autism and Asperger's syndrome are in such programs.

According to the General Accountability Office, there have been thousands of allegations of abuse and neglect in these programs, a number of which have resulted in death, injury, and trauma. In 2005 alone, 33 states reported 1,619 staff members were involved in abuse incidents in residential programs. The GAO also found a pattern of ineffective management that compounded the effects of the abuse.

Your bill will clearly state that children placed in residential programs, including therapeutic boarding schools, wilderness camps, institutions boot camps and behavior modification facilities, have the right to be free from abuse and neglect. The bill will increase transparency. It will hold programs accountable through unannounced site inspections, civil penalties, and enabling parents to seek redress in a court of law if their child is abused and harmed. It will also encourage states to adopt strong enforcement and monitoring programs.

Every child in this country deserves dignity and respect, and freedom from an abusive environment. This is particularly true when children are in residential programs--unable to go home at night, cut off from their parents, advocates, and others who could help them. Surrounded by their abusers, they have little recourse. These risks are even greater when children have disabilities and special needs, like Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and related

disorders. The Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act takes strong steps to protect children in residential programs.

AutCom thanks you for your incredible dedication and strong efforts to prevent abuse and neglect of all children. These efforts have been seen in many of the bills you have introduced over the last several years, including this one. Thank you for championing the safety of children in residential programs, and protecting them from abuse.

Sincerely yours,

Jessica Butler
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