

Northwest Regional Chapter of the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs.

March 12, 2007

WHEREAS:

The programs in Montana (13) that are members of the National Association of Therapeutic School and Programs have formed the Northwest Regional Chapter of NATSAP.

As members of NATSAP, we subscribe to and support the NATSAP Code of Ethics and Standards of Best Practice. We are united in our desire for a bill to pass the legislature requiring and granting the Montana Board of Private Alternative Adolescent Residential or Outdoor Programs (PAARP), the authority to establish, implement and oversee licensure for programs in Montana.

We have come together on this issue for the following reasons:

- 1) We believe that it is in the best interest of the children and families that we serve that there be a reasonable licensure process established in Montana to provide quality assurance and oversight of our programs. We also believe that licensure is in the best interest of programs in Montana.
- 2) Programs operating in Montana provide important services to students and families. The programs represent significant sources of revenue, jobs and taxes in a clean non-extractive industry that contributes to the local economy and quality of life in local communities.
- 3) There is increasing national focus on the importance of licensure that is reflected in both the public media and in recent bills submitted to congress. The primary thrust of this focus is that unlicensed programs are seen as substandard, lower quality and unsafe for children. In addition programs that are unlicensed are characterized as wanting to avoid oversight and licensure. This has a negative chilling effect on all programs in Montana regardless of their quality.
- 4) Because of the increased focus on licensure, programs operating in Montana are at a competitive disadvantage with other programs in other states such as Utah that have well developed licensure process.
- 5) This is a non-partisan issue, there is general agreement on the need for licensure, time is of the essence and it is important to develop licensure in Montana now. We supported the development of the Montana Board of PAARP two years ago with the understanding that licensure would be forth coming. We appreciate and applaud the work of the Board and their thoroughness in examining this issue. However, the time for talk and study is over. Now we need to take action and implement a licensure process.
- 6) The licensure process and requirements need to be sensitive to the needs of the children served as well as sensitive to the needs of the programs that serve these children. It needs to be fair and well thought out. The licensure process is best addressed by the existing State Board of PAARP under the Department of Labor and Industry as established by the last Legislature.
- 7) We feel that it is very important to provide oversight with a board that is truly independent of being controlled by any one program or coalition of programs. At the same time we believe that the state board should be sensitive and responsive to the needs and concerns of programs in Montana. For these reasons we feel that the board should be expanded to include seven individuals rather than five. However we oppose any more than seven as we feel that a greater number will be too cumbersome, potentially ineffective and too expensive.

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8) Three of the board members should continue to be chosen from the pool of executive leaders of programs in Montana, with the remaining four chosen at large by the Governor, with no more than one of them being a government official.

In closing, our industry needs a licensing board to establish standards of care and practice to ensure the safety and well being of the adolescents and parents using such programs. The board should be charged with developing a licensure process and standards in a way that provides public safe guards, and also protects the resourceful development of alternative care that has been a hallmark of these programs.

THEREFORE:

It is the desire of a the NATSAP programs now operating in Montana for the Legislature to pass a bill charging the State Board with the responsibility of setting and monitoring licensing standards for private alternative adolescent residential care programs. This board will remain under the administrative authority of the Department of Commerce and have a similar role and relationship as other existing professional boards such as the, the Board of Psychologists, The Board of Social Workers, or the Board of Physicians. This board will develop and implement a licensure process in the next two years

Thank you for your consideration.

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Hope Ranch  
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