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Subject: Public Comment for Bill SB-312: Revise licensing and regulation of residential youth treatment facilities 2021-03-10 03:00 PM - (S) Public Health, Welfare and Safety Successfully Submitted on 03-08-21 14:19
Attachments: testimony.docx; Handbook amp Parent Contra New Creations Christian_2_.pdf

Details:

Bill: SB-312: Revise licensing and regulation of residential youth treatment facilities 2021-03-10 03:00 PM - (S) Public Health, Welfare and Safety

Position: Informational Witness

Representing an Entity/Another Person: No

Organization: N/A

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Written Statement: I attended New Creations Christian Boarding School in Richmond, Indiana in 2008. This was a religious program aimed at turning around troubled teens by teaching them about God. It sounds good on paper, but this was a program based on manipulation, lies, and brainwashing. This institution, now closed, brainwashed me into believing a religion I did not want to be a part of. When I was 17 years old, my parents kidnapped me (the program instructed them not to tell me where I was going, why, or for how long) and dropped me at this place before eventually pulling me from the program nearly 6 months later. During my time spent in this religious program, I was told no one loved me and that I loved no one because I was not a Christian. I was forced to attend religious services multiple times a day, and if I refused to participate I would've been placed on isolation, losing what few privileges I had. I maintained my best behavior the entire time I was there, knowing that if I did not work the program I would not be recommended to go home. When I had been there for a few months, I asked if I would be eligible to move up to the next level in their level system and was denied the opportunity to attempt it, they told me by asking I was being "manipulative". They would tell my parents lies to keep me in the program, and told me lies about my parents to keep me angry enough at them that I wouldn't tell them about how awful this program was. We lived in a rundown dorm, hygiene practices were nonexistent. We had to do manual labor to maintain the property so they didn't have to hire landscapers or cleaners. Girls would fight, run away, steal each other's things, and would then be placed on isolation. The education we received was a joke, sitting us in front of computers with a Christian based, self-paced program. The problem was, the teachers were not certified. They were dorm staff who couldn't help us if we got stuck on schoolwork. We had no access to the internet, so we couldn't help ourselves figure out our homework. As stated in the handbook, which I have attached to this testimony for review, the program was supposed to break us down completely, reducing us to thinking and feeling like a newborn so that we could re-develop our entire selves in their eyes of what a good Christian teenager should be. We were denied communication with the outside world, except for monitored phone calls with our parents after a period of complete immersion and isolation in the program. We had to spout whatever they wanted us to say in order to move up the level system and regain any privileges, such as the privilege of wearing make-up. There was no therapeutic aspect, no one on staff that was certified to work with children, much less those who had addictions or mental health issues. Many of us had faced trauma at home that caused us to act out. Some of us were there because our parents did not like who we were as people, not because we had actually done anything wrong. It is incredibly difficult to talk about everything that happened to us there, or the emotional trauma and mental abuse we endured. I have blocked much of this time out of my mind and am still in therapy to work through the PTSD I struggle with. Ever since being sent to this program, I lost every sense of myself and have yet to figure that out 13 years later. I struggle with making decisions and functioning as an adult. I have no relationship with my family due to the lies that were told during my stay at New Creations. I have

nightmares, relationship issues, and a loss of any sense of safety, and a host of other issues brought on by this program. I was pulled from the program when the dorm director told my mother that there was no hope for me, because "I had demons in me that would never go away". I was sent here because I was abused by my father, and had a boyfriend my parents did not like. I did not have addictions, attitude problems, school issues, or anything else that would have warranted me being in a program like this. The program did not allow my parents to visit or vet the program before sending me there. They told my family, as shown in the attached parent handbook, that as a "troubled teen" I would lie to them about the awful aspects of the program in order to guilt them into taking me out early. They also had to pay for the entire length of the program even though I was pulled early.

Programs such as this one need to have stricter regulations and oversight in order to ensure the safety of the children who are sent there. They should be allowed to have contact their families, unrestricted. They should not be subjected to physical restraint or violence. They should have access to adequate medical attention, including mental health resources with certified therapists. Parents should have access to their children while attending the program at any time, including in person visits. I also personally believe there should be a cap on what these programs are allowed to charge families, and that they should not be allowed to charge for time in the program that is not completed by the child for whatever reason. These places prey on desperate, scared families who feel like they have no where else to turn. My parents specifically chose this place because it was a religious institution and they wanted me to be a Christian. It caused them to take a second mortgage. Children, and families, deserve better than these programs with the way they currently are managed.

I have attached the complete parent handbook for this program, as well as a testimony I submitted to Breaking Code Silence about my time in this program.

Files: testimony.docx Handbook amp Parent Contra New Creations Christian_2_.pdf Testify via Zoom: Yes Zoom Method: Phone

1.Perhaps you could tell me a little of what was going on in your life before you entered the program?

I was 16, almost 17 when I entered the program. At the time, things were very tense at our house. My older brother was having a lot of issues, he was partying with friends, drinking and smoking marijuana. He was also very withdrawn, which we came to find out later was because he is schizophrenic. My father was an alcoholic and abusive narcissist. He rarely physically abused us, but often mentally or emotionally abused mainly myself and my mother. My mother tried to keep things together but she was very busy at work and didn't always know what was going on at home. When she did hear about the dysfunction that happened when she wasn't home, she pretended it wasn't going on, I think because it was easier for her to deal with it.

I myself was not a stereotypical "troubled teen" necessarily. I didn't drink, smoke, or do drugs. I was a perfectionist and overachiever. I made sure my brother and I made it to school on time, and made sure he did his homework. I did the majority of the housework, even grocery shopping and cooking meals. I had straight A's in school, was a member of the debate team and choir, and had an after school job. I had a great group of friends at school, and was dating my first serious boyfriend. I had started high school in a new school district because I was bullied pretty badly at our local school district, and I loved the new high school.

That being said, I had my issues as well. I struggled with major depression, self harm, and bulimia. I had been hospitalized for bulimia in early 2008 at the age of 16. When I got out of treatment, I continued to see a team of a therapist and nutritionist and had a specific plan I had to stay on for recovery. I worked this plan when I was home, but I had issues with the therapist I was sent to. Family therapy sessions were a nightmare, usually ending with me trying to defend myself in sessions while my family blamed me for everything. Things got worse at home, as my family did not approve of my boyfriend. What started out as an innocent relationship, where we followed their rules, ended up becoming a very intense and I'll admit, unhealthy relationship. We got engaged at 16, as sophomores in high school, and my parents were very upset when they found out. They started restricting how much we could be together. We began sneaking around to see each other, which only made the restrictions more drastic. It was a constant power struggle. I decided I didn't care what they thought, I loved him so I was going to see him no matter what I had to do.

As things escalated that summer, we had a particularly awful family therapy session. I left in tears and refused to talk to my parents, and texted my boyfriend to vent. When we got home, I was in the middle of texting him when my messages stopped going through. It turned out my mother had disconnected my cell phone service to keep me from contacting him. We had a fight, and she tried to leave our house, which would have left me alone there with my dad. I was freaking out, crying, begging her to not leave me alone with him. She locked herself in the car so I could not get in, and called the police on me. When the officer got to our house, I told them all I was planning to get emancipated as soon as I turned 17, that I had had enough of the abuse and unhealthy controlling environment. After that was mentioned, things got even worse.

At this time, my brother had been kicked out of our house, so it was just me and my parents. My mother was being very secretive, and told me to stay home while she ran some errands. Mind you, we lived in the country so the nearest neighbor was about a mile away. My mother took the car we shared, and took EVERY SINGLE PHONE out of our house with her, even disconnecting the land line and the internet. I was home alone, isolated from anyone who could help me. She went to my bank and withdrew all my

money from my bank account, and then went to my 2 workplaces and told them I quit my jobs. When I figured out what she was doing, I walked for a few miles until I found a house where someone let me use their phone and called my boyfriend. I told him to find someone, anyone, who could pick me up before she got back. I was done, and I was going to run away. I packed a bag and waited. My mother came home at the same time the person came to pick me up, and she made them leave before I knew they were there. I don't remember what happened after this until I left for the program, I think I've blocked it out.

2. Were you part of the decision to enter a program? Were you willing to participate?

I was not told about the program at all, even when I was on my way to it. When I arrived, I did not want to be there or participate. I went into survival mode and participated once I realized what was happening.

3. How did you travel to the facility? Were you transported by an escort agency? Please tell me a little about this if you are able.

I woke up one morning about a week after I tried to run away. My aunt was at our house at 8:30, which was strange because she lived over an hour away. My parents sat me down right away and told me I was going away, and that I had an hour to pack. Naturally, I resisted and was very confused, so I put off packing as long as possible. I had a hidden prepaid cell phone by this time, so I texted my boyfriend telling him I was scared and didn't know what to do. My aunt ended up coming into my room after over an hour to "help me pack". She was trying to convince me to go quietly, make it easier on everyone. She saw my phone and told me she wouldn't tell. She still wouldn't tell me where I was going or why. Once I finally came back downstairs, my parents told me to get in the car. I kept asking what was happening, where I was going, how long I would be gone, but they didn't say a word. I started panicking and crying and refused to move any further. I ended up being physically removed from my house, my dad behind me, and my mom and aunt on either side of me. I tried to fight back, and punched my dad. They restrained me and put me in the car and put on the child locks so I couldn't get out. I just remember crying and screaming at them that I would never forgive them for what they were doing, that they needed to let me go. They said nothing the whole time. I ended up seeing a copy of their Mapquest, showing we were heading to Indiana. I told my boyfriend I was going there, but wasn't sure what town or why. We stayed in a hotel that night, and went to the program the next day. My aunt had to share a room with me so I wouldn't run away.

4. If you were not transported by an escort agency, did you meet clients (survivors) who did? Can you tell me a little about that?

No one in my program really talked about how they got to the program. We were discouraged from sharing any information of our lives as "troubled teens", so that we could focus on being more deserving of God's love.

5. What happened when you arrived at the facility?

We pulled into the parking lot and I refused to get out of the car. I just sat there balled up and crying. My family begged me to just get out and make things easier but I couldn't do it. A staff member came up and started trying to convince me to go with her. She tried being sweet at first, and when she realized that wasn't going to work, she told me I didn't love anyone, that I was hurting my family, that I needed

help. I reacted, hitting her through the window with my stuffed animal I had brought with me. I didn't want to hurt her or anything, I just needed her to get out of my face. Eventually I had to get out of the car. The staff walked me to the dorms, while upper level girls unloaded the stuff I didn't know my parents had packed from the trunk. The things I had packed were sorted through and taken away, including my engagement ring. My parents told me that as long as I worked the program, I would only be there for a month. Once I was finally able to have monitored phone calls with my parents, they told me I'd be there until I was 18.

6. Were the rules laid out to you on arrival?

I think they went through some things over the course of a few days, but those days were a blur. I was dissociating most of this time, everything felt unreal. There were so many rules I couldn't really keep track of it at first. I remember being partnered with an upper level the first few days, not allowed to talk to anyone else. I also remember receiving an intake packet that I had to sit in a room alone to read over.

7. Did you have a step program? If so can you tell me a little about this?

I'm linking the parent handbook that fully explains the level system. Basically we started at a level 1, and each level was divided into sub-levels (ex: 1C, then 1B, then 1A before going to level 2). Each level had additional privileges, such as eventually being allowed to wear a red or blue polo shirt or jewelry. I am not sure how many levels there were exactly, as I never made it off of level 1. The steps were designed to treat us as our "spiritual age". This meant at level 1 we were considered newborns, who had to be completely broken down of our old ways and re-started on a path that would lead us to God and spiritual success. Each level represented our journey closer to God. This is fully explained in the handbook.

8. Was there a system of rewards and punishments?

Everything operated based on a points system. I'm not sure the exact details anymore, as it's been a long time, but basically if you did something the staff liked, you got points. If they didn't like you, or didn't like something you did, they'd take points away. This always felt very arbitrary, like there was a set criteria but not really at the same time. It felt like when taking points away they made up offenses. The points would determine your status for the week. The status system was "Super-No", "No", "Yes", or "Super-Yes". Super-Yes status got to do special things like have a movie night or an outing, and go to bed later. If you were a Super-No, you had to go to bed early, got placed on isolation, and had to wear your Sunday uniform, which was a disgusting, bag shaped, floor length jumper over a polo shirt.

9. Can you tell me a little about your interactions with the staff?

The staff was not physically abusive like I've heard about in other programs, but they definitely got to know us well enough to know what to say to impact us. With me, if I did or said something they didn't like or didn't "work the program" enough, they'd be very dismissive of my feelings or call me manipulative if I cried about anything at all. They would tell me I had no reason to be upset after phone calls with my parents, and that my boyfriend back home wasn't going to want me when I got back. The staff tried to appear as mentors or big sisters, and some of the girls got very close to the dorm staff. Staff tended to play favorites with the girls they got close to.

10. Can you tell me a little about your interactions with the other kids?

We had a little more freedom than a lot of other programs. We were able to talk to each other for the most part, but never privately. We could not interact with males AT ALL. We couldn't even look at them on the other side of the church. We were pretty restricted on topics we could talk about, as everything from the outside world was discouraged. It was similar to the relationships the staff tried to portray, where we were encouraged to mentor each other more than anything else to work the program, leave our demons behind, and be more godly. We weren't allowed excessive physical contact with other kids, but we could hug or do each other's hair, things like that.

11. What would a typical day look like?

We would wake up around 5 or 6, make our beds and do a headcount, then get ready for the day. We had a community bathroom and time limits as we cycled through brushing teeth and getting dressed. We wore white polo shirts tucked into navy blue Dickie pants, no makeup, no jewelry, black shoes. Everywhere we went we had to line up, count off, and walk in line formations with no talking. Then we went to breakfast, then chapel. Chapel was usually about an hour each morning, where we were taught a devotional before school. Then we went to school each day, which consisted of individual cubicles where we sat at a computer all day. We used a Christian based education program and self-taught. As a junior in high school, this was extremely difficult because I took advanced classes like calculus, chemistry, and trigonometry. We were not allowed to use the internet to assist in our studies, and there were no licensed teachers to help us if we got stuck. So basically we just took the tests over and over again until we passed them if we didn't know the subject well. All the classes were based in Christianity as well, so for example science experiments became "God made this happen". We were also required to complete religion courses and memorize verses. After school we usually went back to the dorms and had quiet time with our bibles, or community time with other girls in the dorms. During that time, we would do things like knit or color in coloring books. We were not allowed anything secular or related to the outside world, so no TV or books except Christian authors. We were allowed to listen to contemporary Christian music, but at one point we had that privilege taken away because girls started dancing to it and were considered "inappropriate and un-Godlike". Sometimes we had church in the evenings. We would eat dinner, then on certain days of the week we would have to stay to clean the kitchen and cafeteria. On weekends, we did manual labor such as mowing the property or repainting areas in the dorm.

12. Did you witness or experience behaviour that you might regard as abusive?

I didn't witness anything physical or sexual. However, the culture was very emotionally and mentally abusive in the aspect of telling us we would never be good enough, that God was not going to accept us unless we acted in very specific manners. We were brainwashed. I was not religious when I went in, but living in that environment for 5 months had me believing things I had never believed before and have not believed since I got out. We had to drink the Kool-Aid in order to go up in levels, and even then we would be deemed "unworthy". They told us if we ran away, the whole town knew our uniform and would turn us in, and that if we tried to run to the truck stop about a mile away, truckers would rape, murder, and kidnap us.

13. Do you feel that the experience of being part of this program has had any benefit?

There was no benefit whatsoever for me. It was incredibly traumatizing and damaging.

14. Do you feel that being part of the program has had long lasting repercussions?

I was pulled from the program after 5 months, when I went home for Christmas break. I was informed I would not be going back, but to a children's mental health facility in Des Moines. That was a licensed facility with properly trained and vetted professionals, so the environment was much better. But I was so traumatized and conditioned from New Creations that I felt like an alien in the outside world. I didn't realize until I was diagnosed with PTSD at age 29 just how much NC had affected my life. When I finally turned 18, I moved out of my parents house with my boyfriend. Shortly after, I became homeless. I had to figure out how to take care of myself while finishing my senior year of high school. I began to drink heavily, started smoking cigarettes and marijuana, and became extremely promiscuous. I also relapsed and began cutting myself and throwing up again, which I would not get under control again until I graduated college in 2014. I was unable to connect with my peers socially in high school, and that social anxiety got worse as I got older. I would have panic attacks frequently. My grades suffered and I had no motivation or ambition anymore. I did go to college, and when I lived in a dorm I would have to leave if my roommates had anyone over because I couldn't stand being in a crowded room. I have struggled with social anxiety to this day, and have no friends anymore. I have trouble keeping employment for long periods of time. I have stopped speaking to my entire family, except my mother, and have focused on creating my own family with my husband and two sons. I still have nightmares. I can't let other people drive me anywhere, for fear I might end up somewhere I don't want to be. I also struggle with hypervigilance and a persistent feeling of being unsafe. I have learned that if I share my story, people look at me differently, so I have a very hard time getting close to anyone. My husband does not even know the details of what I went through, just that it happened and little stories here and there.

15. Please tell me anything else that you may feel is relevant.

This particular facility had been in operation over 20-30 years, run by a couple who thought it was their mission to "save" wayward teenagers. They told a newspaper in 2016 or 2018, I can't remember, that they were closing the boarding school because "the kids have gotten too difficult to control". They would take us on trips to other churches, where they would do things like speak in tongues or fall out, shaking on the floor like a seizure as they were "filled with the spirit" and if we did not do the same, we would lose points. The education was shit. The food was even worse, and we gained a lot of weight. We were forced on and off medications, and were told that our parents wanted it but in reality our parents did not know about it. We weren't taken for dental or orthodontist appointments, so my orthodontic treatment was delayed. I was forced to go off of my birth control without a doctor's guidance, and suffered extreme cramps and heavy flows until I was able to go back on birth control at age 18. I was also forced to get the Gardasil vaccine, which I was very against getting. They were not licensed to dispense medications and often overdosed students on things like lithium and other bipolar medications, causing girls to hallucinate. When looking the school up a few years ago, before they closed down, I saw that my picture was being used on their website. I called the facility to speak to the owner, and asked that he remove my image from any and all promotional material. He said he would not, as my parents signed a consent form when I was a minor. I told him I'm not a minor now, and if he did not remove my image I would take legal action because I did not consent to attending the school and did not agree with their mission and operations. I don't think it was ever removed, and it still shows

on google when looking up the school. I feel like there is so much to say about this awful place, and not enough space or time to tell it all. We try to make our voices heard, but it is hard to get anyone to understand unless they've lived through these types of programs. Also, I'm not sure how my parents found this place or why they chose it, but I do know they knew exactly what they were signing me up for. The parent handbook explicitly states that we would try to run away, that we would tell them about abuse and horrible situations, and that we were just trying to manipulate their emotions to come home. Whether we completed the 12-18 month program or not, parents had to pay for the full term. So I was there for 5 months but they paid roughly around \$40,000-45,000. My mom says she pulled me because the dorm director told her I had demons inside me that I would never escape. Mind you, I was a "super-yes" status the ENTIRE time I was there. My mom has never apologized or admitted that this program was a terrible place, and is convinced to this day that it did not cause long term effects. She has gone as far as to say I should be grateful for the program and that all she was doing was trying to save my life. This is what these places convince parents they are doing.

Link to parent handbook:

<https://www.pdfFiller.com/jsfiller-mob10/?requestHash=7076df7bbcb6e7fd51d0524bfaa568bf08e50e2a269f35fa5980a3c73bec7f4e&et=l2f&projectId=586660608#ada1a950ca3442038d4cece9f3345cc9>