

Man's suit says drug center kept him as prisoner

By Tracy Thompson

Staff Writer

Straight Inc., a controversial Florida-based drug treatment program that was the target of a Cobb County lawsuit last year, has been sued again — this time in federal court by a 19-year-old Harris County man who charges that he was held incommunicado at the Marietta center for seven months.

The lawsuit filed last week by Martin [redacted] says that he was held prisoner from September 1982 to April 1983 at Straight's Marietta branch. Other participants in the program prevented him from escaping by holding onto his belt loop, even when he went to the bathroom, and sleeping in front of his bedroom door at night, the lawsuit contends.



Tilley

Straight program director Dave Tilley declined Tuesday to comment on the lawsuit.

Straight Inc. is a 2-year-old drug rehabilitation center based in Florida, with three branches around the country. The Straight program has aroused criticism from civil liberties groups but praise from many parents because of the highly restrictive behavior modification and peer pressure techniques it uses to treat drug offenders.

Residents in the program "earn" the privilege of living with their families and attending schools while learning to do without drugs. They live with foster families on rigid schedules dictated by the program and spend hours each day in encounter groups.

The Marietta branch was the target of a lawsuit last year filed by American Civil Liberties Union attorney Kathleen Wilde, who also represents [redacted].

The first lawsuit, which charged that Straight was holding five teenagers against their wills, was eventually dismissed, and the center was cleared of wrongdoing.

The current suit raises a different issue because [redacted] was legally an adult during the time he was held, Ms. Wilde said.

According to the lawsuit, [redacted] was sent to Straight Sept. 22, 1982, after Cobb County Probate Court Judge Vernon Duncan ordered him involuntarily committed to Brawner Psychiatric Institute in Smyrna. The commitment hearing was held at the request of [redacted] parents.

Currently, [redacted] is again living with his parents, though they are not parties to the lawsuit.

After two days at the Smyrna hospital, the lawsuit says, [redacted] was transferred to Straight Inc. in Marietta. The transfer was made with the consent of the probate court and both treatment facilities, though against [redacted] will, the lawsuit says.

Ms. Wilde said that [redacted] had "used drugs to some extent" last September.