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Troubles at Straight Inc.

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Straight Inc.'s drug treatment center for adolescents is having a difficult time settling into its new home in Columbia.

The program continues to run into regulatory **troubles** with Maryland authorities. It has suffered high staff turnover as a result of its move from Virginia. And **Straight** Inc. officials are having a hard time finding new clients; the center's enrollment, which stood at 52 clients in July, has dropped to fewer than 40.

Straight Inc. went a couple of days without telephone service earlier this month. An official said a bookkeeping error left a bill unpaid. Service has since been restored.

"It hasn't helped that we've also received more than our share of negative media coverage," **Straight** Inc. spokeswoman Joy Margolis said earlier this month.

Straight Inc. has been dogged by allegations in other states that it mistreats youths. The program moved its Virginia operations to Columbia on July 29, days before it was to lose its operating license in Virginia. Maryland authorities agreed to grant the center a provisional license for one year on condition that **Straight** Inc. abide by a tightly worded consent agreement governing its activities.

Late last month, Maryland regulators charged that the program was violating the agreement and threatened to take action against the center.

At issue was **Straight** Inc.'s involvement in a controversial host home program that sends clients to spend the night in the homes of families of other clients who have been in the program longer. The center said it had lived up to its agreement to play no role in the placements. But Maryland officials said the center was trying to get around the provision by having a parent committee make the assignments for it.

Maryland authorities contend that **Straight** Inc. or the committee needs a special license to place clients in other homes in order to ensure that proper supervision and safety conditions are in place.

Under state pressure, the parents disbanded their committee. Center and Maryland officials then met on Dec. 19 to work out their remaining differences.

"We continue to work with them," said Clarence Brown, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

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