

Drug program back in business

COLUMBIA (AP) — A controversial drug program closed for violating state laws has won conditional permission to open its doors again.

State health officials ordered Straight Inc. closed Sept. 6 and placed the center on probation for a year because it did not provide on-site education for clients. The center also had no child placement license, officials said.

But state Health Secretary Nelson J. Sabatini said if the center complies with state laws, it will receive full certification. The center was expected to begin an education program today with instruction provided by the county school system.

"We're pleased the whole thing is behind us and hopefully we can get back to the business of providing substance abuse treatment for kids and families," said center spokesman Duke Cross.

The Columbia center has 52 clients and is one of eight centers providing drug treatment to 1,000 youngsters nationwide.

The center opened in Maryland in late July after being forced out of Springfield, Va., in a battle with state regulators who said the center used physical restraints and provided no education for school-age clients. The program also has been accused of using beatings and starvation.