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## **Drug Program May Close; Straight Inc. Fails Md. Certification**

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**Straight** Inc. found itself caught in another regulatory net yesterday when Maryland authorities moved to close the **drug**-treatment center in Columbia for failing to meet state certification standards.

Nelson J. Sabatini, secretary of health and mental hygiene, wrote **Straight** officials that their center for adolescents is "not providing education for some minor children" as required by law. **Straight** also has failed to obtain a license to place clients temporarily in the homes of other clients, he said.

"If **Straight** can comply with the laws of the state, they can do business in the state," Sabatini said in an interview. But, he said, "they are not complying."

Although **Straight's** confrontational treatment methods are controversial, many parents have credited them with saving the lives of their **drug**-addicted teenagers.

**Straight** officials said they would appeal at a hearing Sept. 17. Their program, which is part of a national chain operating in six states, can remain open at its present location in a Columbia business park until it has exhausted its appeals. About 52 adolescents are enrolled.

"We're going to go to the hearing. We have to," said Eugene J. Nieto, acting executive director for **Straight's** Maryland center. "Our parents have made a big investment in our program, an investment in their lives."

Maryland's action follows a decision by Virginia authorities to revoke **Straight's** operating license. **Straight** moved its center from Springfield to Columbia July 29, just days before the Virginia decision became final. Virginia officials said **Straight** was not providing a proper education for its clients, allowed clients to improperly restrain other clients and improperly assessed some clients' problems.

Sabatini said he was aware of the Virginia controversy but said it had little effect on Maryland's certification review. He said **Straight** officials assured Maryland that "they do not restrain or hold people against their will."

**Straight** officials said they hope they can obtain certification. Nieto said the only reason an educational program is not being offered is that Howard County school officials are waiting for the program to receive certification.

"It's kind of a chicken and egg problem," he added.

Peter Finck, who oversees off-campus education programs for Howard County, agreed. He said the school system is ready to send four teachers to **Straight** every day. "I think we will be able to satisfy the department's requirement if we

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can just get together."

More difficult for **Straight** will be meeting the requirement that it be licensed to place youths in private homes. **Straight** clients in the early stages of treatment spend the day at the treatment center and, as a form of peer therapy, spend nights and weekends in the homes of clients who are in later stages of treatment.

State officials say this is akin to foster care and that such placements must be regulated. Such an arrangement could prove unmanageable for **Straight**.

"We have to see what they are talking about there," Nieto said.

**Straight** became the subject of Maryland's regulatory scrutiny immediately after moving to Columbia.

Howard County's director of addiction services, Frank J. McGloin, wrote state regulators Aug. 6 to urge them to "look closely at licensing procedures, particularly in view of the fact that foster parents are apparently used to provide night housing and supervision for members."

"The problem is they could have good houses and bad houses and you would never really be able to tell," McGloin said yesterday.

**Straight's** new center also became the target of families unhappy with the program. A few picketed **Straight** headquarters and threatened to take legal action.

"If **Straight's** application had been approved, you would have seen lawsuits falling out of the trees. It would have looked like autumn on the attorney general's desk," said Gregg Reight, of Columbia, the father of a former **Straight** client.

Reight said he is pleased with the state's decision but "won't really be happy until I can stand in the last empty room."

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