

Straight Inc. to close Columbia office Friday

Sun, The (Baltimore, MD) - February 25, 1992

- Author/Byline: Staff Writer, Michael James
- Edition: FINAL
- Section: NEWS
- Page: 8D

Straight Inc., the drug treatment program that has been under fire since its arrival in Maryland six months ago, will close its Columbia program Friday for financial reasons.

The decision to close the program "was based primarily on the national economic recession," according to a letter sent to state officials yesterday from Bernadine Braithwaite, Straight's national director.

"Effective immediately, we will begin the intervention with the children and their families we currently have in treatment," said the letter, addressed to Gene Heisler, the state health department's deputy director of licensing and certification. "We will want to assure adequate placement so they can continue their treatment process. [An administrator] will be available at the facility until we close on Feb. 28," Ms. Braithwaite said in the letter.

Neither Ms. Braithwaite nor Eugene J. Nieto, executive director of the Columbia program, could be reached for comment last night.

Sources said parents have been instructed to check their children out of the program this week.

Straight, an adolescent outpatient program that emphasizes regimented peer pressure in its treatment, has come under fire in several states for what opponents call abusive practices.

In an interview at the Columbia center last week, Mr. Nieto said that negative publicity about the program was steering clients away.

The decision to close the Columbia program, which is one of six Straight treatment centers in five states, was made by the program's board of directors in consideration of the program's financial trouble not only in Maryland but at its other centers, Ms. Braithwaite wrote.

Last week, Straight officials were ordered to appear at a March 2 eviction hearing after the landlord said the program owed \$42,726 in back rent. The program could have been evicted within two weeks of the eviction hearing.

Also, employees of the program were told that paychecks were being delayed due to financial difficulties in the home office, sources said.

- Record: 1992056022
- Copyright: Copyright (c) 1992 The Baltimore Sun Company