

## DEFENSE WITNESSES PRAISE HEAD OF DRUG REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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More than a dozen defense witnesses testified yesterday in the unlawful imprisonment trial of Possibilities Unlimited director George Ross, heaping praise on Ross and his drug rehabilitation program.

Among the witnesses were people who had worked with Ross in other drug treatment programs, parents of former and current clients in Possibilities Unlimited and former clients. Each said they never had seen Ross restrain youngsters to keep them from leaving the program.

Ross, 36, who founded Possibilities Unlimited two years ago, is on trial in Fayette District Court charged with three counts of unlawful imprisonment. The charges stem from criminal complaints filed by three former clients who contend that Ross used physical and psychological restraint to keep them from leaving the program. Ross had faced five charges when the trial began last week, but Judge John Adams dismissed two of the charges.

During yesterday's testimony, defense attorneys Larry Roberts and Roger Cowden worked to dispel the prosecution's contention that many of the program's routine practices - such as requiring a newcomer to be held by the waistband at all times - constituted restraint.

Yesterday was the first full day of defense testimony. Among those testifying were Urban County Councilman Roy Durbin, who became a member of the Possibilities Unlimited board of directors after his son completed a similar drug program in Florida; Carl Ross, a sales manager for Popeye Sign Co. of Lexington who had a child in Possibilities Unlimited; Debbie ██████████ of North Carolina, who had been treated in the program; and Helen R. Petermann, who heads a drug rehabilitation program in Sarasota, Fla., where Ross once worked.

Each spoke highly of Ross' knowledge of drug and alcohol abuse by teen-agers and praised him for his role in establishing Possibilities Unlimited and his work with two similar programs in Florida.

One father told of relocating his family from California to Lexington so his son could be in the program.

Prosecutors have contended that Ross used many forms of restraint, including the "hand of friendship," to keep young people in the program. The hand of friendship calls for veteran program members to hold newcomers by the waistband everywhere they go, including the restroom.

Ms. ██████████, who had a drug problem before coming to Possibilities Unlimited, said she viewed the hand of friendship as a form of support.

Newcomers also are not allowed to watch television, make phone calls, read newspapers or books or communicate with anyone outside the program other than immediate family members.

Prosecutors also contend that Ross urged parents and foster parents to make their homes escape proof by bolting windows from the outside when program members spent the night.

But during questioning by defense attorneys, the parents testifying denied that Ross ever told them to guard against escapes. Many said they took no special precautions.

"I never heard in all my experience of anyone who nailed their windows shut," said Dr. Robert Bain, who once had a son in the program and who has opened his home to about 30 other enrollees.

Also testifying yesterday was Donna Wilson, a social worker with the Department of Social Services who interviewed two brothers in the program after receiving a complaint from their grandmother that the boys were being held against their will. One of them was ██████████ Mullins, who filed a criminal complaint against Ross.

After talking to Mullins, Ms. Wilson said, she concluded that he was not being held against his will.

"He said if he had his choice, he would not be there, but he felt the consequences would be more unpleasant outside than inside," she said.

Ms. Wilson said Mullins' father had threatened to bring criminal charges against his son if he did not agree to undergo treatment at Possibilities Unlimited.

- **Caption:** PHOTO MUG GEORGE ROSS
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