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Va. Drug Treatment Center Under Fire; State Points to Several Violations in Move to Close Springfield Facility for Adolescents

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State mental health officials are attempting to shut down a private **drug** treatment center in Fairfax County, citing several violations at the facility, which is part of a chain of **drug** treatment programs across the country for adolescents.

The Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services announced yesterday that **Straight** Inc. would be given 10 days to close its Springfield program or file an appeal. The department, which licenses **drug** treatment facilities in the state, cited violations in licensing standards.

Straight Inc. has been cited with several violations in recent years by Virginia officials and has been a subject of lawsuits locally and nationally. Although the Springfield program, which opened in 1982, was hampered by citations before yesterday's action, it had been allowed to continue to operate by the state, which said the violations were not serious enough to warrant closure.

The Springfield facility treats 130 children and adults for **drug** problems.

Jacqueline Ennis, an assistant commissioner for the department, said the action was taken yesterday because of the compilation of violations and the program's history of substantiated complaints. Ennis, citing **Straight's** right to appeal, said the state would not release details of the violations found by inspectors.

Straight Inc. officials said that they did not understand why the state decided yesterday to notify them of the decision to deny renewal of their licenses.

Joy C. Margolis, vice president of public affairs for **Straight**, a Florida-based program that has eight facilities nationwide, said that the facility would appeal the state's decision.

"There is nothing they have listed in writing as a basis for denial that deals with the issues of abuse or client complaints, nothing," she said. "I imagine if they were concerned about that they would put it in writing, and they didn't. All the things listed as reasons for denial are purely documentation issues."

According to state records, the Springfield facility has been cited since 1985 for a series of violations, including allowing clients to restrain other clients, depriving teenage clients of education during initial treatment stages, punishing them by depriving them of food and strip-searching clients in the presence of peers.

A state investigation found recently that the Springfield program failed to notify county officials of allegations that a

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13-year-old boy in the program had been sexually abused by an older client. According to state mental health officials, the Springfield program had allowed a 19-year-old client to stay in the program after he had been accused of sexually abusing two other clients in earlier incidents.

Margolis said the state's list of violations included citations for documents that were not signed and records that did not include middle names, or insufficient job orientation for certain employees.

"We have treated over 50,000 family members nationwide and saved thousands of lives," Margolis said. "**Straight** is a wonderful organization that saves lives."

Del. Gerald A. Fill (R-Mount Vernon) said yesterday he was pleased that the state had taken action to protect the rights of children in the program who may have been abused. But Fill, who is a former **Drug** Enforcement Administration official, said he was concerned by the possible void the closure could bring for inexpensive treatment of children and teenagers with **drug** addictions.

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