

DRUG TREATMENT CENTER TO APPEAL LOSS OF LICENSES

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- Author/Byline: Alberta Lindsey; News Leader staff writer
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Officials of a Northern Virginia drug treatment center say they will appeal the state mental health department's decision not to renew its licenses.

The Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services notified Straight Inc. in Springfield in a March 8 letter that the center has until March 21 to request a formal hearing or shut down.

Joy C. Margolis, vice president of public affairs in Straight's St. Petersburg, Fla., corporate office, said the department's decision will be appealed.

The center has two licenses, one to operate a day program and one to operate a residential program.

The state has cited the center for 76 licensing violations ranging from the failure to list a clients' middle name on a registration form to not providing education for teen-agers in the program.

At a Feb. 26 informal conference, Straight officials said that a number of the violations had been corrected, and they outlined plans for correcting others.

However, the March 8 letter -- signed by Jacqueline M. Ennis, an assistant commissioner with the mental health department -- said that the corrective action plan proposed by the center "does not provide satisfactory assurance that the regulatory non-compliances cited in the past will not reoccur."

The Springfield center and one in Chesapeake, which closed last month, were operating under a court agreement that was issued last year after Washington-area parents complained about treatment at the Springfield facility.

The complaints said that unqualified individuals, including clients, were allowed to restrain clients if they decided to leave the program. In one case, a child's arm was broken, according to records.

The two centers, which used the same methods, were to change the way they restrained clients.

The department notified the Springfield center Jan. 29 that it would not renew its licenses and that the programs must close.

Straight asked for the informal conference, which is the first step in the state's appeal process. The program may continue to operate during the appeal process.

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