

Drug program's bill not straight, mother says Series: TIMES ACTION

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Start Page: 2

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Document Text

In February 1986, I began looking for a drug abuse program for my then-16-year-old son, Stephen. I contacted Dallas Challenge, which told me about Straight Inc. and gave me the number of Scotty Cassidy, director of the not-yet-open Dallas Straight program.

Cassidy showed me a video and told me since I lived in Dallas and would have a host home, that even though Stephen would be starting in Florida I would be entitled to the Dallas rate. He was unable to quote me a figure as the rates were being revised. I called St. Petersburg to set up the intake and talked to both Dr. McKinley (Ken) Johnson and Janelle Meyers, both program counselors in training in Florida for the Dallas program. Each assured me I would be charged the in-town rate as I would be providing a host home.

On March 17, 1986, we enrolled in Straight in St. Petersburg. At intake, I advised Carole Carlisle that Cassidy said we were to be charged the in-town rate. She said she was aware of that, but the contract she gave me was for out-of-town families. She said she was out of the in-town contracts, but since the dollar figure was typed in, she was charging me the in-town rates.

Since everyone I had talked to stressed that the Straight program was based on honesty, and because the day one puts one's child in a drug abuse program is an emotional time, I believed her. I stressed that I had to borrow the \$3,000 I estimated for the trips to Florida, and I would have to cash in my retirement for the rest. The contract I signed was for \$3,600. I paid it thinking it was the in-town rate.

I became aware this was not the in-town rate when the third director of Straight, Dallas, announced to the parent group that Straight was based on honesty and he wanted everyone to be aware of the rates, which were \$3,600 out-of-town and \$1,200 in-town.

About that time, my child left the program and I was pretty much an emotional wreck, so I did not pursue this, hoping to get Stephen back in the program. When he was readmitted in March 1987, I discussed an adjustment on my bill with the new financial person. I only talked with her once and don't remember her name, but since this is a program based on honesty, I didn't worry. I wasn't getting bills so I thought my account had been credited.

In August, I got a bill for \$799.23. I returned it and requested an adjustment. I called in October and again in November and talked to Donna Miller, who said four other families were in the same position. When I called in December, she was surprised no one from Straight National, Florida, had responded to my letter. She called and verified I was indeed due a refund of approximately \$700. I said I thought that was about \$1,100 short and requested an accounting.

In January, no one would take my calls so I left word I was going to the media. An hour later I received a call from Dan Doherty, Straight's fourth director in Dallas. He acknowledged that Straight was based on honesty, but there would be no refund unless I could get a statement from Scotty Cassidy.

At the time of my original letter, Cassidy still was employed by Straight National, and this should have been verified with him at that time. When I talked to Anthony C. Agliardi, vice president of finance, he told me it didn't matter who told me I was entitled to a refund, as no one had that authority. Nor did it matter what Cassidy told me. I thought it significant that the one person in the organization who has the power to authorize a refund did not state that Straight was a program based on honesty. Martha [REDACTED]

Response: Doherty reiterates that the charge was in accordance with your contract and the "burden of proof" of your statements is on you: "I have asked Mrs. [REDACTED] to obtain statements to lend credence to her allegation that she was

promised something verbally not reflected in her contract.... Her reference to verbal statements 22 months old must be clearly substantiated before I can recommend an adjustment be made to her account."

If you can get a statement from Cassidy, give Doherty a chance to discuss the situation with Agliardi. If that fails, we suggest you consult an attorney. We're not on a first-name basis with agency law, but it's worth investigating. But if Cassidy pulls an Ed Meese, you may just have had a \$2,400 lesson in getting all verbal assurances in writing.

Action solves problems. If you have a question, write: Times Action, c/o the City Times and Independent, P.O. Box 1121, St. Petersburg 33731, or call 893-8171 to leave a recorded request. Calls will be accepted anytime except between 9:30 and 11:30 a.m., Monday through Friday, while messages are being transcribed.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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