

## Straight's accounting problems corrected, state official says

■ *Straight Inc. is a drug treatment program in Pinellas County that uses peer pressure and behavioral modification techniques on juveniles from 12 to 18. For the past few months it has been under investigation by the State Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.* ■

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Accounting problems involving a \$50,000 federal grant to Straight Inc. have been corrected, state officials said Friday.

But city of St. Petersburg auditors continue to exercise control over all purchases made by the juvenile drug treat-

ment program.

It is still unclear whether Straight has violated a federal conflict-of-interest law by apparently employing relatives of several governing board members, state officials say.

Straight employees receive salaries backed by the grant money, which the governing board controls.

**TWO HIGH-LEVEL** state officials say they plan to visit Straight March 28 to investigate the apparent conflicts.

They also will check Straight's procedures for potential federal violations of a racial discrimination law. In 18 months of operation, Straight has treated more than 460 clients: Only one has been black, and a few others have been of minority races.

"We've completed the financial investigation, but not the programmatic one," said John H. Dale Jr., assistant chief of the Bureau of Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance in Tallahassee.

"There are still some questions," said Dale. "We don't have a whole heck of a lot on them" in the way of program evaluations.

Dale and Harry W. Moffett, with the Department of

Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS), will make the trip from Tallahassee to Straight's 5000 Park St. headquarters.

Dale's agency administers federal grants throughout Florida. It tries to make sure that grant money not only is properly accounted for, but that it is going to worthwhile programs.

**STRAIGHT'S GRANT** is from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). The city of St. Petersburg acts as Straight's local sponsor, and further supervises its accounting procedures.

Early this year auditors in Dale's office discovered that Straight had improperly mixed the LEAA grant with other money.

The grant was placed into a single bank account, though city officials say they told Straight to maintain separate accounts.

City officials since have untangled the finances.

If Dale's investigation finds that Straight has mishandled the LEAA money, future grant payments could be halted. Or — though less likely — the drug program could be ordered to return some of the money, officials say.