

## DRUG CENTER OKS LIMITS

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ST. PETERSBURG -- A controversial drug treatment center has promised it won't keep teen-agers in the program against their will.

The pledge by Straight Inc. satisfied state demands that it comply with Florida law or lose its license.

Straight administrators Friday submitted a plan to the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services that Straight clients would be reminded daily the program is voluntary and that clients have a right to leave at any time.

Straight also said it would report child abuse immediately and arrange medical treatment for clients.

A state investigation last month found 13 teen-agers who were enrolled in Straight against their will and 15 more who said they were coerced or tricked into enrolling, officials said.

The investigation also turned up evidence that Straight officials failed to report to HRS when they learned about child abuse that occurred outside the program.

"It appears that if these new procedures are followed that Straight Inc. can operate in compliance with the law," said Thomas Wester, HRS deputy district administrator. "Hopefully, it's going to mean a significant change in the way in which they're operating the program."

Webster said his office will recommend that HRS Secretary David Pingree approve Straight's plan.

"The department will monitor Straight at least on a monthly basis to ensure compliance," Webster said Saturday.

While Straight plans to comply with state law, Executive Director William Oliver said he still doesn't agree with state officials.

Oliver said parents should have the right to force their children into drug treatment because children often are incapable of making the right decisions.

In Florida, children have the right to accept or refuse drug treatment.

"One minute they want to be here and the next minute they don't," Oliver said of the center's clients.

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