

## JUDGE, STATE TANGLE ON DRUG RULING

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A judge has ruled that parents can force minor children into drug-treatment programs without their consent, but attorneys for the state argue the decision ignores recent rulings on children's rights.

The ruling by Circuit Judge Charles Miner of Tallahassee was issued last week in favor of Straight Inc., a nationally known drug treatment program based in St. Petersburg.

Straight Inc. has been fighting with state officials for several years about whether parents have to get court orders to force their children into the controversial drug treatment program, the St. Petersburg Times reported Friday.

The state has no right to limit "the legally protected and time-honored prerogative of responsible caring parents in the exercise of control over their minor children," Miner said in the five-page opinion.

Straight Inc. sued the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services a year ago after HRS ordered the program to stop treating teenagers under 18 against their will, unless a judge approved the treatment.

"We're just delighted with the decision that has been made," said William D. Oliver, executive director of Straight Inc. "This is the issue that has surrounded Straight since its inception."

Theodore Mack, an attorney for the HRS, said the state will appeal the ruling.

"I think it is pretty much ignoring all of the latest decisions and national trends that show children have rights to keep from being locked up just like anybody else, whether the parents want them to be locked up or not," he said.

Mack said the ruling would set a bad precedent. If parents can force their children into drug treatment programs without the approval of the child or a judge, "then any parent could walk in and say, 'I think my child has been shoplifting. Lock him up in jail for a few weeks.' We don't do that."

- Memo: The state

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