



Important Announcement

from the office of
Christine James-Brown, CWLA CEO

Many of you have asked about CWLA's response to current Congressional activities regarding safety and accountability in residential treatment programs. As you may know, two bills – Congressman George Miller's bill in the House and a draft bill by Senator Orin Hatch – have proposed new requirements to address serious and sometimes tragic safety concerns for children served in unregulated/unlicensed programs often called "boot camps" or therapeutic schools. As currently written the bills will apply much more broadly to those residential treatment programs that are already licensed and/or accredited to provide services to children including those in the child welfare system.

As you know, our primary focus in all of our public policy work and in this new legislative activity is the safety, permanence and well being of children and youth. Because we are careful to use this screen in all of our interactions with elected officials and legislative staff, we have developed the credibility that comes with a commitment to practice excellence. We also have as our most critical asset the legitimacy that comes with having both a network of private and public organizations in every state and a commitment to serve as a national voice on behalf of vulnerable children and families.

In the current environment all child welfare services including prevention, child protective services, kinship care, foster care, adoption as well as residential treatment are under increasing pressure to make the changes that will meet the needs of today's children and families and to achieve even better outcomes despite limited resources. CWLA remains committed to supporting our members in their efforts to navigate these changes and to providing the leadership needed to realize better results for children and families even as these priorities seem to present competing demands.

As we look to the future, we strongly believe that residential treatment services are an important part of the continuum of care for vulnerable children and youth. We also support the ongoing efforts of residential treatment programs to ensure that their services are high quality, family focused, serve the appropriate children for the appropriate amount of time and that their ultimate outcome provides a child with a therapeutic environment that meets their unique needs for safety, permanence and well-being.

The movement toward keeping more children at home or in community settings in combination with the current funding declines challenges the ability of residential treatment programs to achieve these goals. In this context, the current legislative proposals in the Miller and Hatch bills present an additional burden in an already challenging environment. In addition, there is the major event in Washington for the next eight weeks that may have a significant impact on the child welfare system—how we will or will not re-make this country's health care system.

Specific to our public policy work on the residential care bill, we have ongoing communications with the offices of Rep. Miller, Sen. Hatch and others about their legislative proposals. We continue to be focused on the need for increased safety for children across residential treatment programs but we have also been clear that duplicative accountability and unnecessary administrative requirements divert the resources of quality residential programs and prevents them from keeping their attention on serving children and families. In response, we will cross walk the CWLA standards of excellence, and the requirements of the three major accrediting organizations (Council on Accreditation, the Joint Commission, and the Commission on

Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) that work with CWLA member agencies as they relate to the provisions of the Miller and proposed Hatch bills. We will use the cross walk to provide a clear picture of existing accountability measures, make the case about duplication of effort and to keep the focus on the best practices and program improvements that help us keep children safe and meet the needs of our nation's most vulnerable children and families.

CWLA standards of excellence, emerging research knowledge regarding successful programs and practices along with the information we develop in partnership with our members and the congressional staff are important resources for our work and for the work of many advocacy groups concerned with this issue. We will carefully choose when and how to support other advocacy efforts without losing our ability to maintain our important position as the independent voice for vulnerable children and families.

In addition to our public policy work, we continue to obtain input from and support our members in residential treatment and keep the spotlight on best practices in residential treatment program in a variety of ways:

- We continue to support the residential care and mental health advisory committees and recently issued a call to the field to identify new individuals to serve on these important committees.
- We will offer a special track at the CWLA National Conference that will be planned with input from the advisory committees.
- This summer, we will devote two upcoming CWLA radio programs to issues of concern to the residential treatment community.
- We are developing a special edition of the Child Welfare Journal on residential treatment services. It will be available in March 2010.
- Upcoming editions of the Children's Voice magazine will feature work that residential programs are doing to transform their services and reduce the use of restraint and seclusion.
- CWLA is also part of the Building Bridges Initiative Steering Committee and we recently made changes in our staffing of the committee to provide greater learning and coordination between CWLA and the Building Bridges Initiative. We are currently planning a National Conference Institute that would highlight key tools and efforts for implementing the Building Bridges Initiative.
- We will continue to strengthen coverage and access for the children and families you serve by making sure any new health care reform helps to address some of the existing shortfalls that you confront each day.

I strongly believe that the unique advantage that CWLA can bring to any situation is our commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families and our vast network of organizations on the ground that have the day to day responsibility of advancing this commitment.

I thank you for the important work that you do. Please feel free to share your thoughts and observations on this issue with me and other members of the CWLA team.

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