



Philadelphia teen dies at Tennessee facility for troubled youth

(Sun, Jun/24/2007)

PHILADELPHIA - A teenager sent to a Tennessee facility for troubled youth by the city's social services agency died after a confrontation with the center's staff, prompting Philadelphia officials to consider relocating dozens of teens who were sent there.

Omega Leach, described by city officials as a 17-year-old whose many troubles included racing a stolen car, was sent last month to the Chad Youth Enhancement Center outside Nashville. The mental health facility for troubled teens was approved by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services.

But Leach got into a physical confrontation with the staff on June 3 and died the next day at a Nashville hospital. He tried to choke one counselor, and another staffer pushed Leach facedown to the floor and pulled his arms behind his back, police said.

Investigators are trying to find out whether Leach was restrained improperly, preventing him from breathing.

"There's no doubt that the kid had an attitude and probably needed to be locked up somewhere," Sgt. Brian Prentice, of the Montgomery County, Tenn., Sheriff's Office told The Philadelphia Inquirer for a story Sunday. "It doesn't mean he has to be dead."

Leach's care was the responsibility of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services. The department has come under harsh criticism, and seen an administrative shake-up, after reports in The Inquirer detailing the number of children who have died under its watch.

The agency was paying Chad \$285 a day for Leach's treatment, even though questions had been raised about the center in the past. In 2005, a 14-year-old Long Island girl died there of heart failure as she was being escorted by a counselor.

Now, the Philadelphia agency has frozen admissions to Chad and says it is putting into place "a contingency plan" for relocating 45 city children still there, pending further investigation.

A Philadelphia judge criticized the agency for failing to inform the courts of the 2005 death. Judges had been sending children to Chad on the agency's recommendation.

"It's disturbing to the point that it's unacceptable," said Kevin Dougherty, administrative judge of Philadelphia Family Court.

Arthur C. Evans Jr., the city's acting human services commissioner, originally told The Inquirer that the agency had not been informed of the 2005 death. But officials reversed themselves after learning that a former Chad executive disputed their account, The Inquirer reported.

Evans acknowledged failures in agency oversight, but said a new system would provide "a much more accurate picture" of the quality of outside contractors such as Chad.

Chad and its corporate owner, Universal Health Services Inc. of King of Prussia, declined to respond to detailed questions. They instead issued a statement to the newspaper, defending their record.

"We have a reputation and history of being a high-quality provider of behavioral health and substance-abuse services to troubled youth and their families," Duwayne Glaser, Chad's chief executive officer, said in the statement.

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Information from: The Philadelphia Inquirer, <http://www.philly.com>

Article's URL:

<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/103-06242007-1368110.html>