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Sex abuse claim at Pines youth center investigated

NORFOLK

Virginia investigators have determined a Norfolk treatment center for troubled youth failed to properly report and document an allegation of sexual abuse by a North Carolina resident.

The incident at The Pines Residential Treatment Center, a private facility that serves youth with mental, emotional and behavioral problems, was a "peer-to-peer" one, according to Meghan McGuire, spokeswoman for the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

The Pines has three treatment centers in Hampton Roads - one in Norfolk and two in Portsmouth, licensed for a total of 424 residents.

North Carolina spokeswoman Renee McCoy said the state has suspended any new North Carolina admissions to the three Pines facilities, effective April 13, and is reviewing the cases of 113 North Carolina residents currently residing there because of concerns about patient care, treatment, staffing and training.

The North Carolina families of some residents of The Pines have been contacted about possible moves.

McGuire said in an email that the allegation was reported by a boy who stayed at the Norfolk facility, which is on Kempsville Road and is licensed for 82 youngsters.

The allegation was reported to North Carolina officials after the youth's discharge on Jan. 31.

The Virginia licensing officials were contacted last week by the North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services, according to McGuire. Officials in that office told Virginia officials a complaint had been received from the boy's family earlier this month.

McGuire said that North Carolina had not found any proof of abuse but determined there was enough credibility to the complaint to take action. Officials there noted the incident had not been reported by The Pines to state licensing officials in Virginia and North Carolina, which is a requirement of state-licensed facilities. McGuire said other treatment concerns were also noted in the complaint.

Phone messages left for administrators at The Pines facilities in Norfolk and Portsmouth were not returned Thursday.

A report by Virginia's licensing officials completed Thursday said the facility had violated a regulation that any serious incident be reported within 24 hours to the agency that places the child

in the facility and to the resident's guardian. The facility also failed to properly document a January allegation in which the boy said another resident touched him in his private area, the report said.

Virginia's licensing officials were not informed of the allegation in a timely manner, according to the licensing report.

The Pines is expected to submit a "corrective action" to the department by May 11. McGuire said further action by the state is undetermined at this point.

McGuire said Virginia licensing officials continue to have concerns about treatment, training of staff, and supervision at The Pines.

"There are limited residential placement options for children with severe emotional issues like those the Pines will admit so we work diligently with providers to make sure they improve and provide a safe environment and effective treatment for troubled young people," McGuire wrote in the email. "Over the past several years, we have encountered significant problems at the Pines' facilities that have required tremendous monitoring time by DBHDS licensing and human rights staff. Since concerns continue to arise despite staff's continual efforts, it may again be time to reevaluate the status of their license."

The Pines has been the subject of numerous investigations and citations by the state, which has been struggling to improve its mental health facilities.

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