

# Deseret News

## 2 youth counselors charged in California boy's death

*14-year-old was staying at treatment center in Draper*

**By Pat Reavy and Rebecca Palmer**

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Two counselors at a residential youth treatment center in Draper where a 14-year-old boy died in June were charged Thursday in connection with the boy's death.

Deborah Cole and Jorge Ramirez, from Youth Care Inc., 12600 Minuteman Drive, each face one count of abuse or neglect of a child, a third-degree felony.

On June 27, Brendan Blum of California was suffering bowel and stomach problems. He had been vomiting and suffering from diarrhea all night, said Draper Police Sgt. Gerry Allred. Rather than contacting the on-call nurse as the facility's policy dictates, the boy was simply given some medicine and put in a separate room away from the rest of the boys, he said. The next morning, the boy, who was listed as a disabled child because he had Asperger's syndrome, was found dead on his mattress.

"There was no really good reason why they didn't take him ... no explanation except they just thought it was an upset stomach," Allred said.

An autopsy determined the boy had an obstructed bowel that deteriorated as the night went on, Allred said. The on-call nurse, who was later interviewed by police, said if she had been called to look at the boy she would have advised he immediately go to the hospital, he said.

The Utah State Medical Examiner concurred, "if medical intervention had been obtained, (the boy's) death would have been preventable," according to court documents.

The boy's mother, Dana Blum, said she is appalled that workers at the facility didn't take him to an emergency room. Any time a child dies while in the care of a licensed facility, the facility should be shut down immediately, she said.

Blum has filed a complaint with the Utah licensing board and is waiting for the investigation to be completed.

She hopes the individuals who operated the facility will be held accountable along with the workers.

"I don't wish them any ill, I would just like to see justice done for my son," she said.

The facility issued a statement shortly after the boy's death saying it was the result of a "medical condition." The group home is operated by Aspen Education Group, based in Cerritos, Calif. It is a division of the CRC Health Group, which runs boarding schools, outdoor education programs and weight-loss camps.

Ironically, the charges came one day after the Government Accountability Office in Washington, D.C., found thousands of abuse allegations at camps and other private treatment facilities around the country.

Blum hopes the national attention will result in stricter standards and more accountability across the board.

Brendan was placed in the facility following treatment at a California hospital. Blum said she researched Youth Care Inc. extensively before sending her son there.

"This is double-edged sword for me," she said. "I am not a deadbeat mom."

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