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Teen boot camps under scrutiny

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Jon Martin-Crawford of Hancock, New York

Tom Walker/Eyewitness News

Washington - Lawmakers are calling for federal regulation of so-called "boot camps" for kids. They are all across the country, but alleged abuses at the camps were described as "sickening."

One case, caught on tape, got national attention. Martin Lee Anderson, 14, died after being roughed up by staff at a youth boot camp in Florida. Now congressional investigators say they have found thousands of other cases they say turned their stomachs.

"The abuses included staff members forcing children to remain in so-called stress positions for hours at a time, to undergo extreme physical exertion without food, water, or rest; and to eat their own vomit," said Rep. George Miller (D-CA).

Often modeled after military boot camps, the camps exist to straighten up troubled teens, but investigators said they were reminded of the abuses inmates suffered at the Abu Graib prison in Iraq.

"A 16-year-old boy having trouble breathing and walking was tortured and humiliated for days. One staff member told the boy he deserved an Academy Award for faking it," said Gregory Kutz, Government Accountability Office.

Kutz said the sales pitches often mislead. Camp officials were recorded telling an investigator posing as a teen's father what not to tell his wife.

"I want you to tell her it's a college prep boarding school," the official said.

One who was abused himself as a 13-year-old said he is still scarred by it.

"I have nightmares today of being back in that place and being told that I'm never gonna leave that things are gonna never change," said Jon Martin-Crawford of Hancock, New York.

Investigators said they found more than 1,500 cases of reported child abuse at residential facilities including boot camps, more than 100 of those were in Indiana.

Lawmakers are calling for federal standards for youth boot camps with periodic inspections.



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