

Patterns Persist:

Alarming Concerns in Ohio's Residential Treatment Facilities for Children and Youth

The current mandatory “minimum standards” floor is sagging in several youth treatment residential facilities across Ohio. After 75 visits to Ohio Youth RTFs since 2020, DRO's team identified persistent and pervasive problems within these facilities:

- *Serious and systemic cases of abuse and neglect,*
- *Unapproved and painful restraint techniques,*
- *Inappropriate use of restraint including chemical restraint,*
- *Peer-to-peer bullying and staff intimidation,*
- *Poorly supervised, unstructured, and re-traumatizing environments,*
- *Failures by agency leadership to provide safe, trauma-informed cultures*

As the federally authorized protection and advocacy (P&A) system for people with disabilities in Ohio, part of **Disability Rights Ohio's** (DRO) charge is to intentionally amplify the voices of the children and youth directly receiving services. DRO simultaneously advocates for rights education and the physical and emotional safety of children and youth as part of rights protection. DRO believes that when a state agency licenses and certifies a residential treatment facility to provide services to children and youth the public should be able to rely upon those licenses or certifications as an assurance that children and youth are safe, that the services required are being provided, and that the standards set are met consistently for as long as the entity remains licensed or certified.

“The children and youth of Ohio, along with their parents and guardians, need to know that they will be protected from facilities and individual staff when they perpetuate harm, that state agencies will consistently apply rules and standards to their oversight responsibilities across all their youth licensed facilities, and that the immediate and long-term actions that state agencies take will be handled with transparency and ongoing accountability.” -Amy Price, DRO Associate Advocacy Director

RTFs are highly restrictive settings, second only to hospitalization, that serve some of the most vulnerable and at-risk children and youth in our state. Many of these live-in settings closely resemble institutions in environment and operations than what the public would define as “a home”.

“I don't feel safe here.”

-A youth interviewed by DRO inside a facility

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From January 1, 2020, to March 31, 2026, DRO conducted on-site visits at facilities to complete a set of 66 monitoring activities and 9 investigations. Investigation concerns across several facilities included serious and systemic cases of abuse, neglect, and inappropriate treatment of youth inside these facilities. When a facility does not meet minimum safety, care, and treatment standards DRO believes that the state licensing agencies need to be able to take immediate action and use existing tools available to them to enforce accountability, rapidly remove youth from harmful treatment settings, and swiftly remove a facility's license either temporarily or permanently. Additionally, an abuser registry needs to be created to make the individual(s) involved in a substantiated abuse or neglect incident ineligible for hire at any facility or agency until removed from the registry by the respective State Director.

"Information gathered through more than six years of our investigation and monitoring activities shows that problems in these facilities are not rare or one-offs. Through faster and more consequential actions under current licensing rules and new protective tools to increase staff and facility accountability, standards of care and safety can be increased for the youth living in these facilities."

-Kerstin Sjoberg, DRO President & CEO

Families, guardians, and systems of care should have ready access to information about facilities that are failing minimum care and quality standards. When a facility is mandated to engage in a corrective action plan, the treatment and environment have already fallen below the minimum standard of care determined necessary. Ongoing and intensive staff training for those staff who are specifically responsible for milieu management needs to occur; as unlicensed personnel these staff have not received formal clinical training.

Ohio's children and youth deserve better. Ohio has the potential to become a national leader in the provision of quality, safe, trauma-competent, and recovery-promoting care for children and youth.

***Read the full report at
www.tinyurl.com/patternspersist
or scan here:***

