

Dear Oregon's House of Representatives,

My name is Emmanuel MONNERON. I am a psychiatrist and I have been working for seven years in psychiatric units in several public hospitals in France. I am now taking care of two hundred patients in a consultation center and I'm also responsible of a therapeutic activities center dedicated to provide mental health care to a population of two hundred and fifty thousands inhabitants in the city of Lyon, France.

In September 2020, through a documentary that aired on French national television, I heard about a religious residential treatment center located in Mobile, Alabama, USA. I got pretty curious about the kind of "treatment" this place was supposed to provide and some personal researches allowed me to discover the huge network of wilderness therapy programs, therapeutic boarding schools and residential treatment centers that operates in the United States of America.

I had the opportunity to read the testimonies of former residents of some of these programs. I also watched several documentaries and had the chance to take a look at some records provided by former residents.

I have to tell you that I got pretty concerned about the information I collected about the way the residents are treated in some of these facilities. And even if I am not an American citizen, I feel like, as a mental health professional, it's my responsibility to speak out when the security of vulnerable youth seems threatened, no matter where these children are located in the world.

Some of these children were abducted from their home in the middle of the night by strangers and transported across the country against their will to places they knew nothing about. Some of them were strip searched when they arrived at the final destination. They learnt pretty quickly that they would have no privacy, that they would be watched when they would shower or go to the bathroom, that they would not be allowed to communicate freely and that they would be completely isolated from the outside world during their entire stay in the facility.

It seems like a lot of children were (and are) abused in these places. A lot of testimonies describe violence, sexual assaults, poor living conditions, medical neglect. More testimonies explain that isolation, restraints and forced medication were used as very common punishments to force the residents to obey some insanely long lists of meaningless rules. As a psychiatrist, I know pretty well that these measures can be very traumatizing, they usually don't help the patients and should only be used in case of an emergency, as a very last resort if someone's safety is threatened and for the shortest period of time.

As a trained physician, I want to assure you that the methods described in the survivors' testimonies have nothing to do with proper mental health care. They are useless and dangerous and have left so many former residents with severe and long lasting mental health conditions such as complexe post traumatic stress disorders, depression, anxiety and/or substance abuse.

Private companies' first goal will always be to make profits. And this is something that is usually not compatible with providing proper mental health care. Trying to take care of the most important amount of children while employing the least possible amount of staff members will always lead to dramatic situations such as the ones described in the testimonies of these former residents. And this is the reason why this industry has to be legally regulated.

I'm writing this letter to the Oregon's House of Representatives today to support bill SB710 because I consider it to be an important step toward more regulation when it comes to residential treatment centers standards in Oregon and in the United States of America.

I want to thank you for your attention and the time you spent reading this letter,

Respectfully,

Dr Emmanuel MONNERON