

Watchdog Group Helps End Abuse of Parental Rights

The new School Safety law stops the Florida Baker Act from violating parental rights and traumatizing young children.

CLEARWATER, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, June 30, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In the last four years the Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) Florida's Baker Act Hotline has received more than 700 calls from distraught parents trying to free their children from psychiatric facilities. According to the CCHR Florida staff who answer the hotline, eighty percent of those calls could have easily been avoided. Most common among them are children with developmental disabilities, such as autism, who do not meet the criteria for a Baker Act and in almost all cases the child is removed from school by law enforcement.

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Diane Stein, President of CCHR Florida

For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that Shawn, a 10-year-old boy with autism, is still haunted by the day in 2018 when he was Baker Acted. Shawn was separated from his distraught father, placed in the back of a police car and unable to contact his family while being held overnight at a psychiatric facility—“all because he expressed to a teacher some distress over losing a playground game.”

While Shawn was being questioned by a sheriff's deputy, his father, Brian, “explained to the deputy that Shawn had autism and was not always able to control his emotions, but these kinds of reactions were normal, and he knew how to help Shawn deal with them.” Brian's begging and pleas to spare his son from the traumatic experience of the Baker Act were refuted by the deputy, “claiming that the law required him to take Shawn to a facility once the school called, regardless of his father's ability to care for him appropriately, regardless of his wishes, and regardless of the fact that his son had a known developmental disability that accounted for his behavior.”

Shawn, the SPLC report stated, had recurring nightmares about the incident and still “frequently talks about not wanting to ‘go to jail’ again.”

“Misconceptions on how and when a Baker Act can legally be initiated is one of the main reasons our organization began delivering training courses on the mental health law,” stated the President for the Florida chapter of CCHR, Diane Stein.

CCHR not only delivers continuing education to attorneys and mental health professionals on the Baker Act but also works with law enforcement to adopt internal policies that help prevent Baker Act abuse. In just two years there have been close to 160 policy adoptions, but CCHR believes that education alone is not enough to stop abusive involuntary psychiatric examination of children.

“We are on the ground speaking to these parents” whose children are wrongfully and involuntarily taken into custody, said CCHR Florida’s Abuse Case Coordinator Pat DiMartino. “So we know how much it’s happening. This is a real situation. It’s a law that has gone off the rails and is being totally misapplied.”

Its continued misapplication traumatized Hilary Caskey’s son after he was unnecessarily Baker Acted at nine years old. “I had to homeschool him for the next three years,” said Caskey. “If a cop show came up on TV he ran from the room crying.”

Caskey was never called when her son was Baker Acted and received a “nonchalant” message from school faculty about an incident involving her son. Only later that day did she find out that her son was Baker Acted.

Mya Camargo’s son was also wrongfully Baker Acted, and she said he refused to attend public school after the incident. “I am so happy that the School Safety bill is passed because it will save so many kids in the long run from trauma,” said Camargo.

The School Safety bill was signed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis on June 29th after it passed the Florida House and Senate unanimously. The change to the law will require schools to make “a reasonable attempt to notify” parents before police are called to transport their child to a psychiatric facility where their shoe laces are taken away and in some cases are they not allowed



The new law requires schools to make “a reasonable attempt to notify” parents before their child is removed from school in handcuffs.

to see their parents for up to 72 hours.

“This legislation was definitely not something that happened over night,” said CCHR Florida’s Outreach Director Katerina Alemis. “Part of it came from educating people about parental rights.” By creating their own “Parental Rights” booklet and an online website to help parents understand some of the rights accorded to them under the law, CCHR Florida has reached 906,918 people since 2015 to raise awareness about parental rights that could help prevent misuse of the Baker Act.

“Our primary focus for years has been to restore parental rights by simply giving parents the opportunity to help their child as a first course of action,” said Stein. “The law clearly states that a person in crisis can be helped by a willing family member in place of a Baker Act, but this was being ignored. And when you are dealing with a child, this is not just abuse, it is a parental rights violation.”

Caskey said if she was called before her son was Baker Acted, “I would have been there in 10 minutes.” With the passing of the School Safety bill, “My rights don’t end at the school door.”

About CCHR:

CCHR is a non-profit mental health watchdog group dedicated to eliminating abuses committed under the guise of mental health. CCHR, an expert in mental health human rights, works to ensure patient and consumer protections are enacted and upheld. In this role, CCHR has helped to enact more than 180 laws protecting individuals from abusive or coercive mental health practices since it was formed over 49 years ago. For more information about CCHR Florida visit, www.cchrflorida.org

CCHR was co-founded in 1969 by the Church of Scientology and Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus Dr. Thomas Szasz at a time when patients were being warehoused in institutions and stripped of all constitutional, civil and human rights. It was L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, who brought the terror of psychiatric imprisonment to the notice of the world. In March 1969, he said, “Thousands and thousands are seized without process of law, every week, over the ‘free world’ tortured, castrated, killed. All in the name of ‘mental health.’” For more information on the Church of Scientology visit, www.scientology.org

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