

Mental Health Watchdog Celebrating 32 Years of Protecting Human Rights in Florida

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida chapter of the [Citizens Commission on Human Rights](#) (CCHR) is celebrating 32 year as a mental health watchdog this month. Dedicated to the protection of children and families from abuses in the mental health industry, CCHR Florida started out as a simple volunteer activity in 1977. By 1989, CCHR Florida had become a formal chapter having grown from a small group of human rights activists into a statewide movement that that has helped to create positive change while raising awareness on mental health human rights. [1]



The headquarters for CCHR Florida are located in downtown Clearwater.

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Having now grown to more than 4,500 members across the state, CCHR Florida has helped to secure the safe release of more than 1,300 people from unjust Baker Acts since 2015.”

Diane Stein, President CCHR Florida

Over the past 32 years, CCHR Florida has created a track record of being the only non-profit resource that both educates and actively protects citizens against ongoing psychiatric abuses. As an example, the campaign to protect children from illegal Baker Acting— a statewide crisis that resulted in over 37,000 involuntary examinations initiated on children during 2018-2019 —reached millions of Florida families and in 2021 Florida law was amended to require parental notification before Baker Acting a child. [2]

CCHR started the crusade to restore rights and dignity to the field of mental health in 1977 by taking the issue of

consent to Tallahassee to promote a bill that would eventually result in a watershed victory for patient rights in Florida: helping to pass legislation that required informed consent before ECT

[\(electroconvulsive therapy\)](#) could be administered to mental health patients. Prior to CCHR's work to protect patients, those labeled as mentally ill would receive ECT treatments without their consent. ECT is the practice of sending 460 volts of electricity to a patient's brain by use of electrodes— like what cattle receive in slaughterhouses— and has been documented to cause brain damage, long term memory loss, and death.[3] Thousands of survivors of ECT have complained of its traumatic effects on their lives, and in Texas— the only state that actually reports deaths 14 days post-ECT treatment— reported a death rate in recent years that represents an estimated 300 deaths nationally each year from ECT.[4]

In the early formative years, CCHR also instigated a statewide campaign to educate Florida's citizens on the dangers of the drug Ritalin which has been documented to contribute to suicide, drug addiction and even early death.[5] This free public information campaign offered several alternatives to the use of Ritalin—especially useful since Ritalin began being prescribed 20 years prior to the age of the internet and there were little to no public resources on Ritalin available.[6]

Also notable was CCHR's investigation and exposure of patient abuse at Anclote Manor Psychiatric Hospital, an inpatient mental health facility mainly for teenage boys that was located in Tarpon Springs—20 miles north of Clearwater. Anclote Manor had earned a national reputation due to judges from all over the U.S. giving troubled teenage boys two choices: face prosecution for their crime resulting in a permanent record for having committed a felony or be committed to Anclote Manor Psychiatric Hospital to receive treatment.

During the investigation CCHR exposed the abusive use of insulin shock, the wrapping of patients in freezing sheets and much more. Using public demonstrations depicting the abuses that were leaked out of Anclote Manor Psychiatric Hospital by patients and staff alike, CCHR was able to garner public attention to the truth of the hospital's barbaric practices ultimately leading to the closure of Anclote Manor.

Protecting children is just one facet of CCHR's push for human rights in Florida. In 1981, the widespread practice of using the mental health law to have the elderly declared "incompetent" was exposed by CCHR. At that time, and based upon a single petition from a relative, the court would order two psychiatrists to complete a surprise 5-minute interview on an unsuspecting senior at their home. In approximately 98% of the cases, the elderly person would be found incompetent by the psychiatrists, and would be stripped of any legal rights.

CCHR Florida spearheaded what became a massive investigation into this issue by helping to restore the legal competency of two senior citizens, one from Clearwater (who had been imprisoned in a locked psychiatric ward in a nursing home) and the other from Riverview. The Clearwater Sun decided to look into the abuses and the result was a 6-part series entitled "Guardianship— Protection or Prison," which was highly critical of the entire mental health system. Once again CCHR didn't just settle for exposing the abuse but embarked upon a public information campaign to educate seniors on their rights including the legal consequences of

being declared incompetent, how to be restored to competency, uses and abuses of guardianship, and alternatives to guardianship.

Unfortunately, similar elder abuses still happen today. According to the Annual Report on the [Baker Act](#), released in June of 2019, there were 210,992 involuntary examinations conducted under the guise of treatment— an increase of 120% from 2001— with 1 in 13 initiated on persons 65 years of age or older. This equates to 15,457 Baker Acts initiated on Florida’s elderly, including those with dementia, in one year.

Having now grown to more than 4,500 members across the state, CCHR Florida has helped to secure the safe release of more than 1,300 people from unjust Baker Acts since 2015 and is currently engaged in campaigns to stop the illegal involuntary psychiatric examination of seniors and to ban the use of electroshock therapy in Florida.

About CCHR: Initially established by the Church of Scientology and renowned psychiatrist Dr. Thomas Szasz in 1969, CCHR’s mission is to eradicate abuses committed under the guise of mental health and enact patient and consumer protections. L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, first brought psychiatric imprisonment to wide public notice: “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,’” he wrote in March 1969. For more information visit, www.cchrflorida.org

Sources:

[1] Florida’s Baker Act in the News <https://www.cchrflorida.org/baker-act-abuse/>

[2] Baker Act Reporting Center https://www.usf.edu/cbcs/baker-act/documents/ba_usf_annual_report_2018_2019.pdf Florida Senate Bill 590: School Safety <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2021/590>

[3] <http://emord.com/blawg/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/1-ECT-Citizen-Petition.pdf>

[4] <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.52.8.1095>

[5] <https://www.cchrflorida.org/children-on-ritalin-long-term-effects/>

[6] <https://www.thefix.com/content/research-shows-ritalin-causes-long-term-brain-injury>

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