

Alabama Youth Facility Sued Over Another Child Sexual Assault Incident

The Laurel Oaks Behavioral Center in Dothan, Alabama, and its parent company, UHS, are facing a lawsuit following another sexual assault of a young resident.

DOTHAN, AL, U.S.A., February 9, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Laurel Oaks Behavioral Center in Dothan, Alabama, and its parent company, Universal Health Services, are facing a lawsuit (CV 2022-900168.00) following another sexual assault of a young resident. The attorneys for the victim say facilities like Laurel Oaks are part of the [“troubled teen industry,”](#) a multi-billion dollar network of for-profit youth residential facilities where widespread abuse and neglect are increasingly coming to light.



An 8-year-old resident at Laurel Oaks was sexually assaulted by another resident at Laurel Oaks Behavioral Center in Dothan, Alabama.

The assault at Laurel Oaks demonstrates the systemic issues plaguing these types of facilities, according to the victim's attorneys.

Pensacola attorney Caleb Cunningham of [Levin Papantonio Rafferty](#) (LPR), and Birmingham attorneys Tommy James of Tommy James Law and Jeremy Knowles of Morris Haynes represent the child.

UHS, a Fortune 500 Company, owns and operates Laurel Oaks. UHS is one of the largest companies operating these facilities across the country. Its website says it treated 3.2 million people last year, earning more than \$12 billion in revenues.

8-Year-Old Victim

According to an amended lawsuit filed Thursday in Houston County, Alabama, Circuit Court, an 8-year-old resident at Laurel Oaks was sexually assaulted by another resident who had also



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*CALEB CUNNINGHAM,
ATTORNEY, LEVIN
PAPANTONIO RAFFERTY*

physically assaulted the victim the day before. The boy weighed only 56 pounds and had been in the facility for slightly over a week at the time of the assault. It took employees of the facility more than 12 hours to notify the boys’ parents of the assault.

A History of Sexual Abuse

The lawsuit states the facility advertises on its website that it “provides a secure environment for children and adolescents” and that children there are “monitored in a

safe environment 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

Attorneys for the boy say this incident is yet another failure occurring at the facility, which has a history of sexual abuse. In 2014, a 17-year-old patient was charged with felony counts of first-degree sodomy. In 2011, a 40-year-old employee of the facility was convicted of sexually assaulting a teenage patient.

“You have a clear pattern of failure to protect the children in this facility,” said Caleb Cunningham. “One sexual assault is a tragedy, and a responsible company would do everything in its power to make sure it never happened again. What we have here, the third sexual incident that the public is aware of, is evidence that this is not a responsible company.”

“This case is deeply troubling,” said Tommy James. “What our client endured is something no child should ever face. Every child entrusted to the care of facilities like Laurel Oaks deserves protection and safety, not betrayal.”

Urgent Need for Reform

“The ongoing abuse in these facilities must end now,” Jeremy Knowles emphasized. “The well-being and lives of our children are at stake.”

The legal team representing the child is calling for immediate action to combat abuse in youth residential facilities. “This tragedy was avoidable and should never have happened,” James said. “By seeking accountability from those responsible for failing to protect him, the child and his family hope to ensure no other child faces such harm. We are hopeful this lawsuit will highlight the urgent need for reform in youth residential facilities and spark significant change.”

Additional Allegations

In addition to the sexual abuse claims, the amended lawsuit also alleges the boy’s clothes were returned dirty upon the child’s release from the facility. These dirty clothes were evidence the

facility did not regularly wash the children's clothes, underscoring the child's claims of neglect. There are also allegations staff pressured the father of the child into keeping the boy at Laurel Oaks even after the sexual assault.

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