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The Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP), one of the signatories to this letter, is Alabama's federally funded Protection and Advocacy system, authorized under federal law to protect and promote the safety and rights of Alabamians with disabilities, including children with mental illness.⁹ This authority provides ADAP access to public and private facilities in Alabama that provide care or treatment to such individuals to monitor compliance with respect to safety and rights. The observations and statements reported on in this letter stem from work undertaken by ADAP over approximately the last six months pursuant to this federal authority. Multiple ADAP staff conducted in-depth interviews with almost one hundred residents from the four Sequel facilities in Alabama

Standards)¹⁵ prohibit facilities from using physical abuse and “harsh and humiliating punishment, including corporal punishment.”¹⁶

Despite these federal and state prohibitions, Sequel engages in a pattern and practice of using violent force against children. During ADAP’s in-depth interviews, residents described Sequel staff slamming residents against walls, punching and slapping residents in the face, using chokeholds, and laying on top of residents who are lying face down on the ground. Staff violence

leading to opportunities for the girls to self-injure, including by cutting with items like glass shards. It appears that Sequel is using the timeout room for punishment or convenience, both of which are unlawful under federal and state law. Youth report that the room lock is removed when ADAP comes on site and replaced as soon as ADAP leaves.

At Sequel Tuskegee, residents are, at times, locked in the “time-out room” for as many as 72 hours, in direct violation of both state and federal law. A child spending the night in the seclusion room must drag his mat into the room and sleep on the floor (Tuskegee residents, like those at Courtland, are not provided mattresses but, rather, thin mats which are placed on prison-like concrete or wooden bed frames.²⁴) The seclusion room has no toilet or sink, forcing the residents to bang on the door in order to get the staff’s attention to use the restroom. When they cannot get staff members’ attention, the boys are forced to urinate in the corner of the room and clean it up later or urinate into a container, if they have one. Staff do not provide adequate monitoring or supervision. In one instance, in utter desperation, a resident set his mat on fire with a contraband lighter, after being locked in seclusion for seventy-two hours.

Abusive Culture: “If your parents really wanted you, y’all would be home.”

Alabama law prohibits “harsh and humiliating punishment, including corporal punishment, physical or emotional abuse” and “verbal abuse of a child and derogatory remarks about a child or his/her family.”²⁵ Yet, in addition to the physical abuse outlined above, facility staff repeatedly demean and curse at children placed in Sequel facilities.

OCR staff regularly verbally abuse the girls:

Staff have called residents “fucking fat,” “fucking ugly,” “bitch,” “stupid,” “slow” (meaning mentally), “emotionally unstable,” and “ignorant.”

A staff member said, “I’m tired of y’all dumb-ass bitches. Fuck with me and your ass is grass.”

During a restraint, a male staff told a girl, “I don’t give a fuck, tell your social worker. What’s she gonna do?”

A girl who staff found in her closet was dragged out and told to “cover that ugly shit up.”

Some of the most disturbing incidents of verbal abuse reported to ADAP occurred when a child was in immediate psychiatric distress and engaging in suicidal ideation at OCR:

Staff responded to a youth who had attempted self-harm by telling her she is stupid for thinking of doing self-

A youth reported to ADAP that “[s]taff talk down to kids all the time. Staff say ‘you ain’t never going to be nothing,’ ‘you gonna go to jail’ and ‘sit your stupid ass down.’”²⁶

A boy at Courtland has soiled himself on a regular basis. The excrement was spread around the room and allowed to remain without being cleaned up.²⁷ This situation was observed by residents, facility staff, and ADAP staff. Courtland staff called this young man, “Shitty.”²⁸

One Courtland youth reported: “

that they are not provided gynecological check-ups or medical care. For several months, Courtland has been without a sufficient number of therapists for individual counseling to occur. Instead, youth were sharing therapy sessions with other youth, compromising the therapeutic process.

Unsafe and Unhealthy Living Conditions: “It feels sad and broken down.”

DHR’s Minimum Standards require that the grounds of a facility be free from anything that constitutes a danger or hazard.³³ In addition, all children living in treatment facilities have a right to adequate heating and ventilation, secure doors and windows, and sturdy and comfortable bedding.³⁴ The Courtland Report³⁵ details at length the squalid living conditions at the facility. These include hazardous conditions such as protruding nails and broken bed frames; “mattresses” which consist of a slim plastic pad laying atop concrete beds³⁶ on filthy floors, many of which are pockmarked by large areas of broken and frayed tile; a gymnasium that is neither heated nor air-conditioned and with barred windows like a prison; dilapidated bedrooms that are dimly lit with barren walls; and a common area with few chairs on which to sit.³⁷ Based on ADAP’s own observations, one youth summarized Courtland well, saying, “[i]t is filthy everywhere here.”³⁸ In sum, Sequel Courtland is a place where no parent would ever want their child to spend a single night. Yet the state of Alabama continues to certify and license

a damaged exterior unit door, walked to the back of the school, picked up broken glass still left in the window frame, and proceeded to cut herself. Due to poor supervision, within the last two weeks, two girls bolted out of damaged doors to fight each other outside. One girl bit the other's ear and pinned her on the ground.

