

Developmentally disabled need a much better grievance procedure

Half a world away children with severe emotional or physical disabilities are tied to a bed and left untouched. The recent newspaper stories and television images were powerful and we believe will bring about changes to an abusive system.

It is the ability to be heard that most often brings about change. In our opinion, the state of Alaska has terrible grievance procedure statutes and associated rules concerning the rights of individuals with a developmental disability or mental illness.

The state does not keep clear statistics on the number and type of grievances filed by patients at the state Division of Behavioral Health's 82 grantee facilities.

A patient or client age 60 or older with a grievance can call the Long Term Care Ombudsman office for assistance. But there is no similar state office for psychiatric patients or those with a developmental disability, under age 60, to call for assistance.

We agree with helping people half a world away, but changes need to be made in Alaska. Statutes and regulations concerning grievance procedures for psychiatric patients and those with developmental disabilities need to be revised. Statistics need to be kept of the type and number of grievances filed. And a state office has to be established to oversee and assist in the grievance process.

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