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Contact: Felix Ortiz

fortiz@disabilitylawco.org

720-202-9871

“Unsafe and Unheard”

Residential Treatment Center Leaves Children Desperate to Escape

Denver, CO — Disability Law Colorado (DLC), the state’s Protection and Advocacy system, has released [a new report](#) documenting dangerous conditions at Southern Peaks Regional Treatment Center in Cañon City, one of only a handful of psychiatric residential treatment facilities in Colorado. The conclusion: instead of providing consistent care and support, Southern Peaks has left many children desperate to escape.

The report is the product of more than three years of monitoring visits, interviews with nearly 50 children, and input from families, advocates, and staff. DLC shared a series of internal recommendations with Southern Peaks before issuing this public report.

Key Findings

- **Excessive restraint and seclusion:** Southern Peaks staff frequently restrain children — an average of 75 times per month, as of May 2025 — compared to few or no such incidents at similar facilities. Children also reported injuries from restraints.
- **Lack of consistent treatment:** Southern Peaks suffers from frequent therapist turnover and a lack of consistent mental health care. Despite recent improvements, children describe the facility as the worst they’ve encountered.
- **Substandard conditions:** Children liken Southern Peaks to a jail — with metal beds, dark rooms, and raw or undercooked food.
- **Broken promises on youth voice:** Programs like the Youth Advisory Council and recreations clubs have lapsed, leaving children with fewer opportunities to offer feedback or engage in positive activities.

“Southern Peaks is supposed to provide a therapeutic environment — that’s the reason it exists,” said DLC Co-Legal Director **Emily Harvey**. “What we found instead is a place where children feel unsafe and unheard.”

Recommendations

Disability Law Colorado calls on Southern Peaks to:

- Reduce reliance on restraint and seclusion.
- Revise staff training and culture to reflect trauma-informed care.
- Ensure consistent access to therapy, education, and safe living conditions.
- Reactivate youth participation programs and feedback channels.

Contact DLC Communications Manager **Felix Ortiz** to schedule an interview with Emily Harvey and with the parents of children at Southern Peaks.

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Disability Law Colorado is a nonprofit civil rights organization, authorized by federal law to combat discrimination, abuse, and neglect. We aim to make Colorado the best place in America for people with disabilities to thrive. For more information, visit disabilitylawco.org.