

Experts offer reassuring views on proposed juvenile sex-offender center

BY HELEN ALTON
Star-Bulletin

A juvenile sex-offender treatment facility the state is proposing in Pearl City should pose no community threat if aggressive teens are screened out, authorities in the field say.

A teen-ager who has molested children but committed no violent acts "is not the kind of individual I would be worried about as a danger to the community," said clinical psychologist Craig Thompson, adding this is "a fairly typical profile of these people."

"I would be much more concerned about a teen-ager who is a sex offender and has a history of nonsexual acting out — assaults that may or may not have anything to do with sex," he said.

Pearl City residents are opposing the state Health Department's proposed treatment facility at the former Waimano Training School and Hospital. It would treat as many as 10 adolescents at a time, who residents fear will pose a danger to the community.

Doug Miller, assistant chief of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division, said very strict admission criteria will be applied. "We will weed out a child with aggressive behavior."

If those are screened out, Robinson said, "I wouldn't have any particular concerns at all."

The department is seeking proposals from private companies to operate the facility, which it hopes to open in July. It also must be accredited, Miller said.

Family Court Judge Bode Uale applauded the state for trying to

develop such a facility here.

"I know the community is up in arms, but these are our kids," he said. "It's a sad situation when I have to send a child out of state."

Uale said most kids he sends to mainland treatment facilities don't want to go, "and I don't blame them. These are local kids. Some have never been away from Oahu. It breaks my heart but I have to weigh their objection to going against the unavailability of treatment here."

The boys to be placed in the Waimano facility, from ages 12 to 17, aren't like adult sexual predators, Uale said. "Adult sex offenders are, and should be, very scary, but these kids for the most part do not fit that category."

He said 95 percent or more of the teen offenders are abused children.

"I'm sure if we said this was going to be a treatment center for abused children, it wouldn't have raised so much flak," he said.

"Some may have touched a child while baby-sitting or something like that," Uale said, "but for the most part these are minor things that we have discovered about them. We try to get them into treatment early to not have them get into a situation where they can't be cured."

Robinson said although it's widely believed by professionals and nonprofessionals that most sex offenders were abused as children, research doesn't support that.

"There's nothing we can find from early childhood that predicts this stuff at all," he said. "But you don't have to understand why it came about to successfully treat it ... Treatment does seem to have a

positive impact as far as reducing the probability of future offenses."

Psychiatrist Al Arensdorf, medical director of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division, said a juvenile sex offense could be as serious as rape but it's "relatively rare that there's an element of coercion."

"The victim most likely would be familiar, participating in the activity, and taken advantage of, such as a 13-year-old engaging in oral sex with a 3-year-old niece," he said.

These are generally kids with arrested sexual development who "remain fixed or stuck, preferring younger children," he said. "In fact, their own view of themselves is they are playmates, the same age as the victim in their mind."

A typical situation, though, would be a 12- or 13-year-old boy stealing women's underwear from a neighbor's clothesline and caught masturbating with the garment by a parent, Arensdorf said.

A judge will order treatment after a child exhibits such behavior two or three times, Arensdorf said, explaining Waimano will provide a therapeutic alternative to confinement in a correctional facility.

Those who end up in an adult prison generally have an added element of aggression and coercion, Arensdorf said.

Costs of treating kids on the mainland are probably about \$600 per day per child, Arensdorf said. The state also pays the cost of family members going to the mainland for periodic visits and therapy sessions with the kids.

About \$500 per bed per day has been budgeted for the Waimano program, Miller said.

JO EL
TV'S EASY
PIC
The Art of
CLD-V88
2 mic Input
Remote c
JV
The
GR-AXM
• 110,000
Color M
• High Per
Life Batt
SC
ALL
CAMC
& DIGI
CAME
ON S
DCR-T
• 360
ZOO
• NIG
O L
• 2 1/2
MO
D-E3
10 se
Limit
exac
ONLY

NEXTEL **FREE** **VoiceStream**
Nokia 5100 w/1 Yr