



Girls' treatment facility raided following abuse allegations

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The Care Cottage is seen along I-45 South

WILLIS, Texas (FOX 26) - A state licensed juvenile housing facility for girls has been raided by Montgomery County investigators. The Montgomery County attorney says charges are likely after dozens of accusations of abuse at the facility. Staff members at Care Cottage in Willis are accused of physically and sexually abusing the children in their care, according to a search warrant that FOX 26 obtained from the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office.

In one case, the warrant claims a staffer broke a girl's arm by twisting it behind her back, then neglected to get her medical treatment. In another, a 27-year-old employee is alleged to have had sex with a 16-year-old girl in the facility's care. The search warrant lists many more accusations at both of the Care Cottage facilities in Willis.

"One of the latest reports I saw—they seemed to maintain that all the girls are safe, and everything is okay, but that could not be further from the truth," said Montgomery County Attorney JD Lambright.

Lambright says his office handled more than 40 cases at Care Cottage before the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office raided the juvenile residential treatment center Wednesday, seizing evidence that he says will likely result in a series of criminal charges.

"It is not one person that is raising these concerns, and it's not necessarily one agency or one source," said Shanna Redwine, a prosecutor with the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office. "We've had multiple concerns raised about child abuse happening there."

FOX 26 called and visited both care cottage facilities to try to get their side of the story, but they declined comment. The Care Cottage locations are home to a combined total of 56 girls, according to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, or CPS.

Prosecutors say the girls are age 6 to 17, and they are placed in Care Cottage by CPS after being identified as having discipline, psychological or emotional issues.

"The state pays these type of facilities based on what I'll call a level of need of the residents there, and those payments can go up to \$475 per day per resident," said Lambright. "This place is bringing in \$5-, \$6-, \$7-, perhaps \$8 million a year, so it's all about money and, I think, little about providing proper care for these girls there."

Lambright says so far prosecutors have dealt with about 100 reports involving this facility. Prosecutors say their big priority is to make sure that the girls are safe immediately, regardless of where they are at in the investigation.

CPS released a statement Thursday:

- *Since each of these 56 children and youth were placed at Care Cottage, CPS caseworkers have been meeting with them individually, and they will continue to do so. Nothing is more important than the safety of these children and our actions will be guided by that sole priority.*
- *All of the abuse/neglect allegations reported to us have been or are being investigated by DFPS. Since yesterday's law enforcement operation, CPS has met with the children at the facility and have determined that they are currently safe. While CPS continues to look into the situation and provide information to law enforcement as requested, it is important that these children continue to receive all their needed services, go to school, and focus on their individual situations.*
- *The Care Cottage employee suspected of sexual abuse, and four other employees, were dismissed prior to Wednesday's law enforcement operation.*
- *Following state law, we share all reports of abuse or neglect with local law enforcement. Any allegation of abuse or neglect reported to the 24-hour DFPS hotline is automatically duplicated with complete information and immediately sent by email to a specific local law enforcement address for CPS reports.*