

My name is Cheryl Karpinski. I live in Kingsley, Michigan which is just south of Traverse City in Grand Traverse County. I am the mother of Aiden William Karpinski who just turned 16 years old. I became Aiden's foster mom when he was two years old and the adoption was final 6 months later. Aiden came from a background of trauma and neglect and physical abuse. His biological mom was a heroin addict and used drugs during her pregnancy. All of these things still impact him today.

In November and December of 2024, Aiden ran away from home and committed two misdemeanor offenses. In January of 2025 a family court judge in Grand Traverse County sent my son to the Sault Tribe Youth Facility in St. Ignace where he was to be locked up for two weeks while the court looked for a residential placement for him. Aiden was already at the top of the waiting list for an in-patient substance abuse facility in Negaunee, Michigan because I had gotten him on that list, but the judge wouldn't consider the Michigan placement. Apparently, she felt she knew what was best for my son.

During this time, my son's probation officer asked us to sign paperwork so that the court could look for a residential treatment facility. On that paperwork was the name of a facility in Springfield, Missouri. Lakeland Behavioral Health. I objected and said I'd never agree to my son being sent to Missouri. We were assured that the facility's name was there just to get the ball rolling and that it might not be there when the process was complete. We were naïve. We signed.

My son was moved to the Midland County Juvenile Care Center because his time in St. Ignace had reached the limit of his stay. I was desperate to stop the court from sending my son out of state.

I wrote to the Governor and Lt. Governor. No response. I wrote to Michigan office of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children and the Juvenile Justice Assignment Unit. I was hoping someone would put a stop to my son being placed out of the state...or at least look into it. They didn't. My State Representative, John Roth, called the court on my son's behalf. He wasn't listened to. My son and I filed an appeal of his removal through the State Appellate Defender Office. The attorney who accepted the case hoped the filing would slow down the attempt to send Aiden out of state. It didn't. I spoke to the appellate attorney last week and Aiden's case is still pending and has not yet been heard by the Court of Appeals. The wheels of justice must be slow moving....

In February I was allowed to go to Midland to attend a virtual hearing with my son. I still naively thought the judge would listen to reason. She didn't. I hoped that the probation officer would say he'd found a placement in Michigan. He didn't. The judge ruled that Aiden was to be sent half way across the country to Lakeview Behavioral Health in Springfield, MO. I asked when they

intended to send him. The judge said, "Right now." The door to the room Aiden and I were in opened and in walked two strangers. From Missouri. They were employees of Lakeland Behavioral Health and had driven to Michigan the day before. I was blindsided. I was told I had a few minutes to help my son go through his belongings and then I was allowed to hug him goodbye. But I couldn't leave. I stood in the parking lot and waited for the car my son was placed in to back out of garage. Then I watched as two strangers drove off with my son. Aiden was looking through the back window at me. I was waving and trying to be strong. I wasn't. My 15 year old son was being taken 800 miles from home....entirely cut off from his family and support system. All so the court employees could pat themselves on their backs and feel that they'd done the best they could for Aiden. They found a placement for him. Actually, it's worse than that. They found an open bed. And that, apparently, was good enough. The court knew nothing about the program. They didn't know what type of treatment Aiden would receive, They didn't know who would be caring for my son. Acadia Health owns Lakeland. They sent two employees on a 1600 mile round trip to come to Michigan and take my son. Any guesses as to why a multi-million dollar company would go to so much trouble? Because placing my son in their open bed in Missouri was going to make them money. A lot of money. Michigan didn't do its job to protect and provide treatment for my son. My kid was nothing more than a dollar sign to Acadia Health, but I place the blame where it belongs. On a state system that would allow our children to be sold to any U.S. facility that has an open bed. At least then we can say we tried....we did our best....we used what was available to us.

I would argue that when the best you can do traumatizes children, rips kids away from their families and allows for-profit companies to make a profit off the pain of Michigan kids and their parents...something is horribly wrong. Some people say Michigan kids aren't being sent out of the state. Don't tell me it isn't happening. My son and I lived it.

Has anyone from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services ever heard of Lakeland Behavioral Health in Springfield, Missouri? Has a state employee ever set foot in Lakeland? Reviewed Lakeland's records? Looked over the licensing reports? The answer is no. I filed a FOIA asking for MDHHS records documenting that a state employee had visited the Missouri facility was told the records don't exist. But Wait! MDHHS didn't place my son in Lakeview. A Michigan judge did. I would argue that is still state funds and is still Michigan's responsibility.

I wasn't popular with the judge or the court in my son's case. I don't care. What they did to my son and to our family is wrong. And I'm not going to be quiet. For three months, I didn't get to see Aiden. When I objected to the lack of treatment, I was told to be quiet. When I objected to the medications my son was placed on, I was told it wasn't my decision. When I objected to not being able to see my son, I was told, "We'll see what we can do" but nothing was ever done.

One ten minute phone call per day....for three months....that's the only connection my son and I were allowed. But hey, on paper....we did something. We tried.....it was the best we could do. My son's psychologist- a good man my son had seen for years- wrote two letters to the court stating the harm that would be done to Aiden if he were cut off from his family. It didn't matter. The psychologist spoke of the trauma Aiden would endure if he were sent halfway across the country. The court didn't care.

Here's what I don't understand: I asked for a list of Michigan facilities that the Grand Traverse County court and Aiden's probation officer had contacted. Tell me the names. When did you contact them? How long is the wait list? What's available? I filed a motion with the court and the judge ruled that I wasn't entitled to that information. You don't even have to provide proof that you've tried to keep a Michigan child in Michigan and you still send him 800 miles from home. Where is the transparency? Where are the safe guards?

What my son endured in Missouri is horrific. He witnessed a fight between two residents during which one of the residents started convulsing and had to be hospitalized. During one of our phone calls I listened helplessly as another resident was threatening Aiden with physical harm. I was screaming, "Call for help, Aiden! Call for help!" Staff members eventually restrained the other resident. A staff member told me that the other resident had been acting up all day and that someone just needed to kick his ass. I'm not making this up. Aiden was forced to sit in a hard plastic chair for up to 12 hours per day...only allowed to get up to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water...because there wasn't enough staff for the unit he was in. He was forced to sit in his room for days because there wasn't enough staff. No one in his unit could go outside or go to the gym...because there wasn't enough staff. An employee told Aiden that he was going to "Snuff the life out of " Aiden. Sounds therapeutic, doesn't it? My son was overmedicated to the point of sounding like a zombie during out short phone calls. He was provided marijuana by a staff member. Items I mailed from home never reached him because they were stolen by employees before they could get to Aiden. Surprised? You shouldn't be? Lakeland's licensing violations are readily available. I know because I obtained them. I read them. This facility's track record isn't a secret. Someone just had to take the time to look...but I'm the only one who did. And I wasn't listened to. Remember. Aiden wasn't placed in Missouri because it was a good program, or a reputable program, or the best placement for him. Aiden was placed there because there was an open bed. Phew! The court signed the paperwork and met the deadline. At least we found a bed. I paid \$10,000 to hire an attorney to fight to bring Aiden home. That finally made a difference.

In May, the judge ruled that arrangements would be made to bring Aiden home within 7 days. I didn't trust the judge. I didn't trust the court. I wasn't taking any chances. I left my home 15 minutes after the judge's ruling and I drove 12 hours straight to Missouri to get my kid. And I

had him in my arms that night. Then I drove another couple hours towards home because I refused to stay anywhere near Springfield, Missouri. They'd had my kid long enough.

The way to help kids is pretty simple. I'm going to set the bar very low. If you're going to order treatment for a Michigan child make sure the placement is in the child's best interest; make sure the child is not cut-off from his or her loved ones, family and community; and investigate facilities before kids are placed there. Review the reports. Visit the facility. Evaluate the outcomes of kids who have been through the program. Were there improvements? Did the treatment work?

I don't want another Michigan parent to have to stand in a parking lot and watch their child be driven to another state by strangers. I don't want another Michigan child to be ripped from their community and family. I want the trauma to stop. Now.

If you remember nothing else of what I've said today, please remember this. DO NO HARM. Michigan kids deserve better. Do no harm. Michigan families deserve better. Do not harm. My son, Aiden William Karpinski, didn't deserve to be ripped from his family and sent halfway across the country. Do no harm.

Thank you.