

S.1351: Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act

The [Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act](#), introduced by Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), John Cornyn (R-Texas), and Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.), was created to study and prevent child abuse in youth residential programs. It was signed into law December 2024.

Key Provisions

The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act requires the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to contract with the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) to conduct a study examining youth residential programs. The findings will be published in a public report every two years for a period of 10 years. The study and recommendations should involve consultations with child advocates, health professionals, state and federal agencies, subject matter experts, and individuals with lived experience.

The report must include the following information:

- The nature, prevalence, severity, and scope of child abuse, neglect, and deaths in youth residential programs
- All federal and state funding sources for youth residential programs
- Existing regulation of youth residential programs
- Existing standards of care of national accreditation entities that provide accreditation or certification of youth residential programs
- Risk assessment tools

Additionally, the report must include recommendations to support the development and implementation of education and training resources for professional and paraprofessional personnel in several fields, including health care, law enforcement, judiciary, social work, child protection, education, and child care. The recommendations should center lived experience, interagency communication, evidence-based practices, and the legal rights of children in youth residential programs.

The report will also include recommendations for community-based alternatives to youth residential programs that are more accessible and follow evidence-based standards to support individuals' health and safety, including by supporting continuity of education and providing mentorship.

Expected Impact on Human Service Sector

The Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act is expected to provide greater oversight and data transparency for institutional youth treatment programs. It affirms a longstanding commitment to rigorous evidence-based standards and children's safety and well-being.