

Kristen [REDACTED]

Date: 5/26/22

To Whom it may Concern;

I am writing to you today as the parent of a current Maple Lake Academy for Girls Student. As you are aware, this facility received a revocation of their license on 5/20/22. . I am writing to you today to provide a parent perspective on my own and my daughters experience at Maple Lake.

My daughter was 16 when she came to MLA from the East Coast. She began to have increased issues with her mental health and stability during the summer of 2020. She spent a total of 7 weeks in an inpatient adolescent unit and then 8 weeks in a short -term Residential Treatment Center (RTC). During this time, we were able to obtain comprehensive testing to identify what her needs were as well as what options were available to us.

My daughter discovered the body of her father in November of 2017. He died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. She was not yet 13. At that point she already had some challenges in school with a diagnosis of ADHD, anxiety and poor academic performance. After a full evaluation she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Type 1 Autism and generalized anxiety. As I am a healthcare professional she spent a lot of time alone due to my work responsibilities during the pandemic. This led to some risk -taking behaviors on her part.

At the point of her needing to go to a more long- term placement the options for her were limited to a handful of programs. Maple Lake Academy was and is still my top choice for her. The therapist who works with my daughter is amazing and has helped both of us acquire skills that we will need when she returns home. The residential director, nurse and teachers are all easily accessible when needed. My daughter has been able to catch up and maintain her academics while at MLA. The teachers all understand the kids and their unique abilities and talents.

MLA has many unique programs including their Recreational and Equine Programs which help students with learning differences understand that their brain is different but that does not mean that they are stupid or cannot have meaningful lives. Many of our daughters have been bullied due to their differences and Maple Lake is a community where they truly can find themselves as well as learn how to optimize their own potential moving forward.

The incident that prompted the original NAA citation was tragic and impacted the families, staff and our children greatly. To my knowledge the parents of that child still remain advocates of the

program. No one from these agencies has asked for our input or our own experience as parents. We have been kept informed of the progress of the complaint to the degree that they are able to. At our last Parent's Weekend, we all discussed that not one parent removed their child from the school. Does that not speak to what we think of the program? Does our opinion not matter?

The second NAA citation contains multiple statements which are not true and inflammatory in nature after speaking directly with the other students' parents. In my opinion, there have also been multiple omissions/errors by the Department of Licensing Team. These include but are not limited to; speaking with our children who are minors without parental permission, no due process hearing for the school for either citation and inconsistent communication from the Department.

I realize there are many of these types of facilities within the state of Utah and there has been increased media attention and pressure from past patients that programs are "bad" and "abusive" and should all be closed. In thinking of my own daughter, I do not know what that would have done if not for MLA. There is a great likelihood she may have been sexually exploited, have substance abuse issues or even be dead.

It is my opinion what has transpired over the last 5 months is a witch hunt to close a program to make an example. Realizing that there is much social media and political pressure around the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI). MLA is a small program so only 13 families and children will be inconvenienced. There are very few places that can meet the needs of the population of children at MLA. Many other places are full at present as well and will not have bed space if the closure happens as currently planned. I would request that there be an immediate stop placed on this closure for a full and fair investigation to occur.

My daughter has made progress that 18 months ago I thought was unthinkable and unachievable. She is finding herself after being lost in one way or another since her father's death. She has had more loss, trauma and hurt in her 17 years than most experience in a lifetime. While we will be graduating in the coming months I want to ensure that MLA remains as a resource for kids like her. A place to be safe and seen, a place to have success in school, and make friends. I am scared for what will happen to the others who are not ready to go home. Where will they go? Many of them will not do well at home or in a traditional program. Will the state be helping those families find another placement?

Please reach out to me if you would like additional information. [REDACTED]

Kristen [REDACTED]

TO:

Michael McDonald
Director, Office of Licensing
Department of Human Services
195 North 1950 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84116

FROM:

Dave and Amy [REDACTED]

May 30, 2022

Dear Mr. McDonald:

We were shocked and saddened to see the second Notice of Agency Action issued to Maple Lake Academy (MLA) for Girls, revoking its license. We strongly urge you to reconsider, as revoking its license would cause far more harm than good.

We have been in discussion with the other parents of MLA students, who all believe the school should remain open – **including the parents of the two students who were referenced in the NAAs**. The lack of parental involvement in this process is quite concerning, not to mention investigators interviewing the children (who are almost all minors) with parental notification. If any of us truly believed that our children were unsafe at MLA, we would have immediately pulled them – **and not a single child has been pulled from the program since these incidents occurred**.

However, we are writing this letter to specifically tell our story – our family's struggles prior to our daughter arriving at MLA, the tremendous progress she has made at MLA, and why it is so critical for us to be able to continue this journey.

When our daughter was 5, she suddenly had obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), needing to take pictures of everything (sunsets, food, etc.), as "it would never be the same again". Her sudden onset OCD went away after 6 months, but came back with a vengeance 2 years later. There were days where she would literally take 1000 pictures or have a complete meltdown if she wasn't allowed to access a camera. She regularly refused to go to school, many times arriving 3 hours late, or not attending at all. We tried many different interventions (including an anti-depressant, which made her suicidal), working with several different therapists, but nothing worked.

We finally realized that she would need to attend a residential treatment program (RTP) if there was any hope of getting her life back on track. We sent her to a summer RTP with limited success, as she was highly traumatized by other aggressive students there. After school refusal only got worse, and she only left her room to use the bathroom for months, we made the heart-wrenching decision to send our 11 year old to a full-time RTP, [REDACTED]. While she made some progress there in her first few months, she stalled out, as the staff misinterpreted her behavior as "bratty", rather than something that was out of her control. It was at this time that she was diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorder (ASD). While our son was diagnosed with ASD 10 years ago (when he was 2), it was only recently that we realized how differently autism presented in girls.

Working with our educational consultant, **we searched for a program that specialized in teenage girls with ASD, and discovered that there were very few of these programs in the country.** The only other RTP that specialized in treating girls with ASD was also in Utah; however, their youngest student was 14 years old – 2 years older than our daughter. Essentially, this was our only choice.

Although our daughter has only attended MLA for about 7 months, we have been incredibly encouraged by her progress. For the first time in her life, she has been able to share her emotions in a constructive way. She has made healthy friendships for the first time. She is having great academic success. This stems from the therapists and staff at MLA understanding that these girls have ASD – that their struggles are not coming from a place of willful defiance, but of challenges with everyday tasks. For the first time in years, we can see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

However, she still has a long way to go. She is still late for school sometimes, despite living at the school and surrounded by full-time therapeutic staff. She still feels compelled to take pictures of the sky or her food. She still gets triggered and shuts down when she hears certain words. We had envisioned her attending MLA for about another year, continuing to work on these issues and finishing her 8th grade year there.

It would be incredibly disruptive for her to have to switch to a new RTP again, especially as it would probably be one that doesn't specialize in ASD for girls of her age. While it is undoubtedly a tragedy that one of the students passed away (note that the medical examiner has still not been able to provide a diagnosis), it would be an even greater tragedy for our daughter to no longer be able to attend MLA.

Once again, we implore you to reconsider your decision. Please, please, please allow MLA to remain open for the sake of our daughter and our family, all of the other girls in the program and their families, and the countless girls and families who would greatly benefit from MLA in the future.

Sincerely,

Dave and Amy 

My wife and I enrolled our daughter at Maple Lake Academy in March of 2021. We chose MLA because we thought it was the best setting for our daughter. MLA has not only met, but has far exceeded, our expectations.

She has received incredible therapy and support. We work very closely with her therapist (who is phenomenal) and the residential staff (also amazing). MLA's top notch team works closely together to provide the consistent care she needs in what is truly a family type setting.

MLA is the first treatment team/placement where the staff, therapists, and entire organization understand our daughter and have the resources, expertise and ability to help her make progress. The staff at MLA works tirelessly to understand her, to help her, and to give her the structure she needs to succeed. And our daughter isn't the only one who is benefitting from MLA. MLA has helped our entire family heal.

Not a day goes by where we don't stop to think how lucky we are that our daughter is enrolled in MLA. We cannot thank everyone at MLA enough for all the work they have done and continue to do for our daughter and our family. We do not know where we would be without them.