

Judge David L.

BAZELON CENTER
for Mental Health Law

NEWS

Experts' Report Is "Damning Indictment" of Managed Mental Health Care for Arizona Children

Washington DC, July 12, 2000—An independent court-ordered review of services provided to 14,000 children by ValueOptions, a for-profit managed care company, under contract with Arizona's mental health system has found "a wide, deep and growing gap" between what the state says it is providing "and the level of performance observed."

In fact, the reviewers found almost no improvement since a similar review two years ago of services provided by ComCare, the firm then contracting with the state to provide behavioral health care services to Medicaid-eligible children.

An expert panel headed by Ivor Groves, Ph.D., conducted the review in April under an agreement in a class action lawsuit, *J.K. v. Eden*. The suit was filed in 1996 to seek adequate mental health and addiction treatment services for children in Maricopa County, where two thirds of the state's children live.

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, one of the public-interest groups representing the children, describes Dr. Groves' report on the experts' review as a "damning indictment of the children's behavioral health system in Maricopa County."

"Deficiencies are legion," note the children's lawyers in a five-page summary of the report, affecting 40% to 60% of the children served. Of the sample group of children whose cases were reviewed, nearly "one-fourth were at 'imminent risk of physical harm from known and preventable causes,' and nearly one-half lagged significantly behind in learning and development." (Emphasis in summary.)

Among reasons for "the system's dismal performance" the summary cites diversion to adult services of "nearly a third of the money ValueOptions receives for children," or \$900,000 a month.

The experts offer recommendations for improving the system, which calls for "more than 'policy tweaking and simple funding adjustments.'"