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Utah-based N.Y. workers charged

By Jacob Santini

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The alleged assault of a teen who was being transported by a La Verkin-based company in New York has officials there delving into a debate that has languished in Utah for more than a decade.

The New York Attorney General's Office reportedly is looking to rein in so-called teen escort services there. Utah's Office of Licensing has tried to do the same, but previous attempts have been blocked by state lawmakers.

"We've tried [to create a license for escort services] three times," said Ken Stettler, office director. " [Lawmakers] wouldn't go for it."

The problem, Stettler said, is that many lawmakers believe the Office of Licensing is "empire building" when it asks to bring another area that privately serves children under its regulatory umbrella.

The issue arose in New York in late March when two "escorts" were charged with assault and false imprisonment -- misdemeanor charges -- after transporting a New York 17-year-old for La Verkin-based Teen Escort Services, according to New York State police investigator James Hunt.

They were taking the teen to the Academy at Ivy Ridge, a program affiliated with the St. George-based World Wide Association of Specialty Schools (WWASPS).

On the evening of March 22, Timothy Hurd, 38, and Leonard Faulstick, 24, allegedly handcuffed the teen and took him from his home at the request of his parents. During the drive, the escorts uncuffed the boy, who grabbed the steering wheel, causing the car to veer into a guardrail.

State police troopers later stopped the car for leaving the accident scene. During the traffic stop, the teen was not handcuffed. The teen reported that the escorts re-handcuffed him, held him down and repeatedly punched him in the face, Hunt said.

But the men's attorney contends the teen's story of abuse only surfaced when police interviewed him in connection with charges of trying to crash the car and harm the escorts.

"When he was faced with serious charges, he fabricated this story," said John Murphy, who is representing both men.

Ken Kay, the president of WWASPS, said Teen Escorts is not owned by the association but is one of the transportation services that is recommended to parents who are sending their children to one of the seven programs affiliated with the organization.

Stettler said licensing of escort services would allow Utah to force background checks and training standards for employees. The regulation would only apply within Utah.



home page

Return to Ivy Ridge Academy Page