

Colorado hired firm to check abuse complaints

Consultants determine that allegations are not credible

By Steven K. Paulson, Associated Press
Thursday, November 27, 2008

GREELEY – An outside consultant hired by the state concluded that most allegations about abuse of children at a Northern Colorado detention facility weren't credible, even though two detainees suffered broken bones.

The reports singled out only three employees of the Platte Valley Youth Services Center for investigation because they were suspected of talking to the news media, according to the documents obtained by The Associated Press.

State officials defended the study, saying they were trying to determine if the allegations were legitimate and not go after discontented state employees or interfere with their right to talk to the media or elected officials.

The Colorado Division of Youth Corrections ordered the probe after employees complained that excessive force was being used against juveniles, that detainees were in danger of injury and that official reports were being altered to delete information that could raise questions about detainee treatment.

John Gomez, director of the division, said the state hired the nonprofit Mountain States Employers Council, which specializes in employer legal issues, because it wanted an unbiased investigation.

The Greeley-based youth center houses an average 130 juveniles ranging from age 10 to 21, including many gang members. It employs about 100 people, but only three were singled out for investigation because they were suspected of talking to the news media, according to the documents.

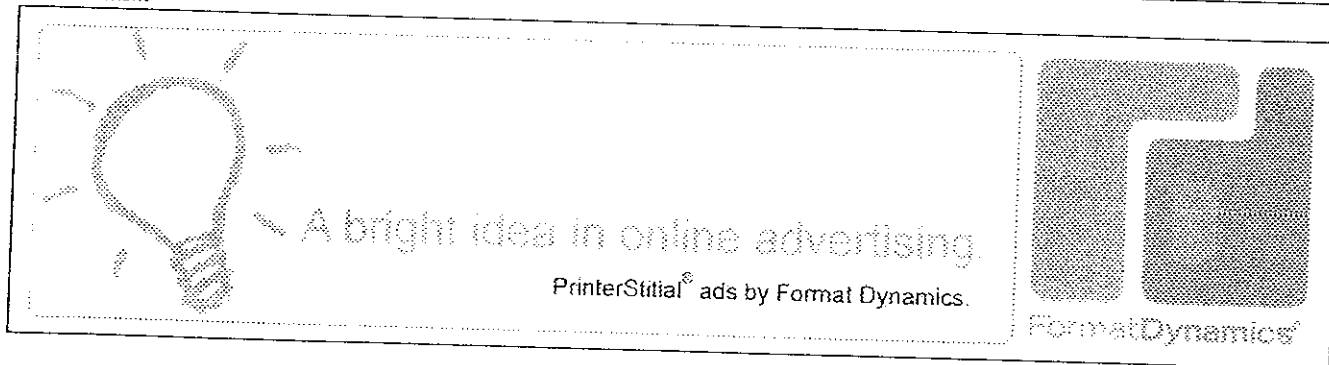
Mountain States was told to focus on youth treatment and staff conduct at Platte Valley and to ensure that employee complaints were being reported to the appropriate authorities. It also was told to "analyze the safety of the Platte Valley facility."

A Mountain States investigator who compiled two reports for the state at a cost of about \$6,000 concluded there was not enough evidence to substantiate claims that juveniles were in danger of being hurt by other inmates.

In cases where there was evidence that staffers may have violated state policies, Mountain States said it was beyond the scope of its investigation and up to the state to determine if disciplinary action was warranted.

John Malloy, a supervisor at Platte Valley, had warned investigators that children were not safe after a youth was assaulted by other juveniles in May, suffering broken bones and nearly losing an eye. After the assault, Malloy said, two other

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juveniles suffered broken arms in separate incidents.

"I don't think that the kids are safe at the facility," Malloy told the investigator.

But the investigator concluded Malloy's allegations had been properly vetted by the state and were unfounded.

"Mr. Malloy is clearly a disgruntled employee," she wrote. Malloy was disgruntled because he believed there was "corruption" at Platte Valley and favoritism in promotions: Malloy claimed favored staffers were given answers to promotion exams to help them pass, the report said.

Malloy did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Chris Chrisbens, manager of workplace investigation for Denver-based Mountain States, said he could not respond to questions about the reports.

The Mountain States reports, dated July 14 and July 25, were obtained by the AP under the Colorado Open Records Act.

A state senator from Greeley said he apparently was mentioned in a Mountain States report that noted that "a current staff member of the facility had met with three Colorado state senators to discuss similar concerns over issues at Platte Valley Youth Services Center."

The report did not name the senators, and state

officials said they did not know their identities. But GOP Sen. Scott Renfroe said he did talk with Platte Valley employees. He said he did not know who the other two were but questioned why the state was keeping track.

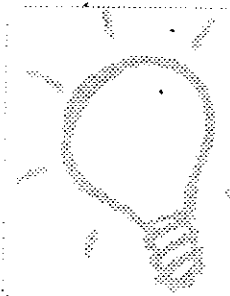
"I want to know why we're included in that report," Renfroe said.

Renfroe said he has discussed employee complaints with Weld County District Attorney Ken Buck, who is investigating them.

Karen Beye, director of the Department of Human Services, which oversees the Division of Youth Corrections, said her department was trying to determine if the allegations were legitimate — not go after discontented state employees or interfere with their right to talk to elected officials.

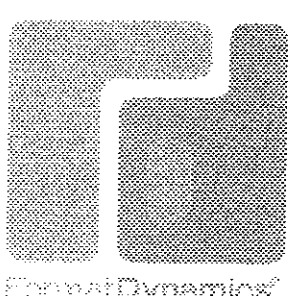
She said it was a justified use of taxpayer dollars because her department needed to determine as quickly as possible whether there was any foundation to the allegations and get them corrected. She said none of the investigations turned up evidence that children were being harmed or that they were in danger of being injured.


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