



DISABILITY RIGHTS OREGON

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## **Report: Kids held at NORCOR jail endure psychologically harmful conditions, solitary confinement**

*Failure to document isolation of kids, lack of regulatory oversight allow inhumane conditions to persist*

**Portland, Oregon**—An investigative report released today by Oregon’s leading statewide disability rights organization found that kids held at the Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Facility (NORCOR) in the Dalles endure harmful and counterproductive management strategies that are not tied to improved safety or security of the facility. Kids held at the jail face frequent, prolonged, and undocumented isolation; are prevented from reading, writing or drawing, and are subjected to harsh and purposeless rules such as prohibitions against “looking around” or asking what time it is, according to the report from Disability Rights Oregon.

NORCOR – like all juvenile detention facilities in Oregon – operates without any county, state, or federal oversight to ensure that the kids are held in safe and humane conditions. This lack of accountability has allowed NORCOR to neglect the basic mental health and social development needs of kids in its custody.

*“NORCOR deprives kids of human contact and the tools for healthy human development. Kids as young as twelve were locked in their cells for hours at a time and weren’t allowed to read, write, or draw,”* said Sarah Radcliffe, managing attorney with Disability Rights Oregon and author of the report. *“They were isolated and had no one to talk to. They weren’t allowed to look out of windows or to ask what time it was.”*

Most youth reported that they spend between three to six hours per day locked in their cells. Youth who are suicidal or experiencing serious mental health concerns at the jail are denied human contact. Relatively brief periods of isolation can cause serious and lasting harm to

children's neurological and social development. In violation of Oregon law, NORCOR does not maintain any records documenting periods during which youth are confined to their cells.

Oregon has one of the worst child incarceration rates in the country - only Wyoming is worse. Youth incarceration rates across the U.S. have dropped 50 percent since 2006. Oregon has lowered its rate by just nine percent.

*"Too many kids are incarcerated at NORCOR, they stay there too long, and conditions of confinement appear designed to punish instead of teach life skills," said Radcliffe. "That approach imposes an impermissible cost on the long-term health and stability of our communities, and the social development and mental health of kids in the system."*

To fix these conditions, Disability Rights Oregon is calling for immediate implementation of the 2016 recommendation by the Oregon State Court Juvenile Justice Mental Health Task Force: that all child-serving systems commit to employing evidence-based, trauma-informed practices. The report recommends the creation of a Children's Cabinet to spearhead juvenile justice system reform, and that juvenile detention facilities be regulated and licensed. This will ensure safe conditions, adequate healthcare and programming, and prevent the use of solitary confinement.

NORCOR -- a regional jail created through a partnership between Wasco, Hood River, Sherman, and Gilliam counties -- holds 100 to 130 adult inmates and roughly 20 to 24 youth detainees. One third to half of youth at NORCOR are incarcerated due to probation violations. These are often "technical" violations, meaning that the offense wouldn't warrant detention if the child were not on probation. NORCOR maintains contracts for youth detention with 17 Oregon counties, the Warm Springs Reservation, several Washington counties, and Immigration + Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The report, "Don't Look Around": A Window into Inhumane Conditions for Youth at NORCOR," can be found on Disability Rights Oregon's website: [www.droregon.org](http://www.droregon.org).

### **About Disability Rights Oregon**

Disability Rights Oregon upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in the community. The nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. For 40 years, the organization has served as Oregon's Protection & Advocacy system.

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